INTERVIEWS RIDLEY SCOTT AND JON WOO • FIRST REPORT GTA VICE CITY

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E3 2002: 40 PAGES OF THE HOTTEST NEW GAMES

(C-12)
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"All of a sudden there was this bright light

and I felt my body lifting off the ground. The next morning I had scars all over. I swear some of my insides are missing. The worst part is, I think they're coming back."

– Velda Ruddock, 58

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Mild Language
Violence

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play

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

vol. 1 issue 7

This was my twelfth year attending industry trade shows, and the most eye-opening in a long, long time. I'm more exited about gaming than I have ever been—something I didn't expect I'd be saying a couple of years ago. I can only compare E3 '02 to Chicago 1991, when Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts shook McCormick Hall with its groundbreaking rotation effects, and Sonic made his Genesis debut. This year's festivities began with Sony's Kaz Hirai declaring the console wars over, with Sony as the victor. With 30 million PS2s sold worldwide compared to Microsoft and Nintendo at around four mil a piece, a price reduction across the board from PSOne to PS2, the LCD screen and even their Dual Shock, he has a lot to brag about and be proud of. However, I don't see the war as quite over yet; in fact, I believe it's just getting started. Here's why. Forgetting about numbers for just a second, let's take a look at the big picture.

There's no arguing that in terms of software, '02 is going to belong to Nintendo, but only because they're hitting with a bevy of big brands in the same year—an occurrence that only comes around two to three times per decade. Mario Sunshine (which was met with mixed reviews at E3), will be gargantuan, and the new Zelda will be even bigger. The surprising Metroid and Star Fox will also easily break the million mark, making this overall a big software win for the GameCube. Heck, my pal Wario may even get in on the action. Not to mention the Game Boy Advance, which, with Yoshi's Island, a new Zelda of its own, and Metroid, will also enjoy a record-setting year, even tough the GBA market overall is in a shambles, and you still can't see the damn thing. But beyond '02, with Nintendo's ammo spent, and the Xbox closing in with a lower price and way better games across the board, what will '03 bring? Retro is a mess, Rare is not happy, and one man spread thin (Miyamoto) does not a company make. Add to that Nintendo's current relationships with the enthusiast press (Microsoft, Sega, and Sony treat us like family, while Nintendo treats us like Lepers) and you've got a fizzling GameCube from '03 on. They may be riding high now, but when they look to the third parties and press to bring up the rear, they may be surprised; you reap what you sew. Of course, their thinking is that Nintendo games are always going to sell in the millions regardless of what we say, and you know what, they're probably right. But I still think their policies are going to bite them in the butt sooner or later. It's frustrating that we can't do our jobs where Nintendo is concerned and bring you coverage in our unique style. When you want to hype a game and the door gets slammed in your face, there are bound to be some hurt feelings, especially when those games mean so much. Before I get off on a rant about the new Nintendo, on with the show.

Meanwhile, the Xbox, which is far and away the most powerful console, is now an incredibly low $199 considering its components, and oozing with happy new developers and much love from Sega—who are now in a position to really tip the scales. Shenmue 2, Toe Jam and Earl III: All Funked Up, Panzer Dragoon Orta, and the shiniest versions of 2K3 are the icing on Microsoft's big green cake. Provided they can continue to shed their steely PC image and continue to build their console-friendly new guise, Microsoft is the company that Sony really needs to worry about in the years ahead. For the most part, all three platforms are going to get the cream of the third-party crop (save for Sony's golden-goose GTA/Metal Gear/Madden coo and the odd Square game), but the biggies will be spread console-wide, with the Xbox versions almost always looking just a bit (or more) better. This may boil down to a first-party war in the years ahead, so let's have a look at that equation.

On the Sony side you've got Sly Cooper (their best new game by a mile), Ratchet and Clank, The Mark of Kri, the ambitious but hyper-Brit Getaway, and Primal, from the blokes who brought us Medievil, plus exclusives on Tomb Raider, Metal of Honor, Shinobi (now that's big), Contra (also really big!) and Sega's bone-crunching Gungrave. Meanwhile, over in the Microsoft camp, you've got Tork (my game of show), from the creators of Rayman 2; Artoons surprise of E3, Blinx The Time Sweeper; Tim Shafer's brilliant new game Psychonauts; the quintessential mech blaster, MechAssault; Brute Force; a little franchise called Halo; the blistering Quantum Redshift; and on the exclusive side, Capcom's Steel Betallion; Star Wars RPG; and the Sega titles I mentioned before. Okay, I need a clone. I believe that many of these games—from both camps—represent the brands of tomorrow, the true evolution of our industry, and one heck of a console war in the years ahead, even with Sony's head start and current lead. These new staples of the video-game world are being sculpted and molded by the minds who grew up playing the classics like Mario, Sonic, Castlevania, Contra, Shinobi, Final Fantasy, etc. And they have at their fingertips amazing new tools to realize the vivid new gamescapes that in the years ahead are going to enrich our lives more than ever.

Finally, sooner or later (most likely later), the online wars are bound to become a factor too, and here, Microsoft should prove a major threat. Of the three companies online platforms, Sony and Microsoft seem to have both barrels loaded, while Nintendo's holds a pellet gun, and it's not loaded. They've waived any online licensing fees for good reason (their third parties are broke from GC and GBA fees). The game they showed at their press conference, Animal Crossing, a fruity sim for very young kids, is better left unseen and unheard next to Sony's FFXI, SOCOM, and Madden, and Microsoft's Brute Force and Project Ego. Nintendo's got an uphill battle in front of them.

So to sum up: Nintendo: be nicer to us! Sega: we love you and thank you! Microsoft: kick ass, we've got your back. And Sony: hail to the king, baby!

"MICROSOFT IS THE COMPANY THAT SONY REALLY HAS TO WORRY ABOUT..."

DAVE HALVERSON, EDITOR IN CHIEF

YOU'VE NEVER HAD A PET LIKE THIS.

Let's just say he's not your normal pound puppy. Then again, she's not exactly your normal owner. She's Lilo, a feisty little surf betty with 'tude to spare, and he's Stitch, a two-foot genetic alien experiment on the run. She was just looking for a pet. She ended up with an alien with a knack for destruction. Making mischief on the beautiful island of Hawaii is what it's all about. Lilo likes to use her voodoo wand, whereas Stitch, well, he just likes to smash everything in his path. Good luck enforcing leash laws with this pair.

Disney's Lilo & Stitch

PlayStation

Disney Interactive

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Violence

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jon m gibson
executive editor

Jon is a "pugilist specialist." And as of the day that this July issue of **play** lands on newsstands, he challenges Mr. Lennox Lewis to a match of furious fists. A word of advice: Bet on Jon. He's got the reach that Tyson dreamed of. The punches will sting, but the groin kicks will hurt even more. Check it:

LEWIS/GIBSON.

brady fiechter
editorial director

WARNING: Drinking can cause liver damage, impair judgement, and lead to the inability to operate heavy machinery. Only adults 21 and over are allowed to purchase such beverages.

michael hobbs
art director

Michael is looking for a new toothbrush, even though he doesn't need one. He's a sucker for any oral hygeiene breakthrough.

nelson lui
associate art director

Our concern for Nelson hasn't been dumped at the curb. On the eve of finishing this seventh issue, he's officially broken all direct, verbal communication with the rest of the staff. Now he merely honks in Morse code from behind the wheel of his Lexus. We also overheard him and his car planning an escape to Hawaii.

tom ham
contributing writer

Tom, a freelancer we found wandering around aimlessly in Raccoon City, figured out the secret that the Umbrella Corp. *never* wanted you to know. Instead of letting the undead gnaw on his flesh, he turned the tables on 'em, tossing some salt on their scorched, muddied tissue and feasted away. Yum.

Disney's
Stitch
EXPERIMENT 626

STITCH IS ON THE LOOSE.

Bad dog! Dog? It's going to take a lot more than a couple of inches of reinforced steel to hold back Stitch, a pint-sized fighting machine who lives and breathes mayhem. There's nothing he enjoys more than exploring new paths and destroying everything in them. He doesn't hide behind boulders. He throws them. Help him solve puzzles and blast enemies with a weapon in each of his four hands. (Did we mention he's a genetic alien experiment out of control?) With power like this, it's easy to go through walls. And a heck of a lot of chew toys.

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Comic Mischief
Violence

Disney INTERACTIVE

PlayStation 2

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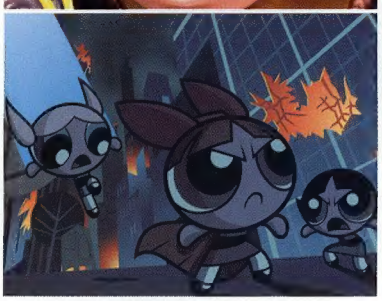

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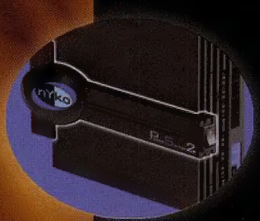

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ink

edited by **play** magazine staff

SONY RIDES THE CRAZY TRAIN

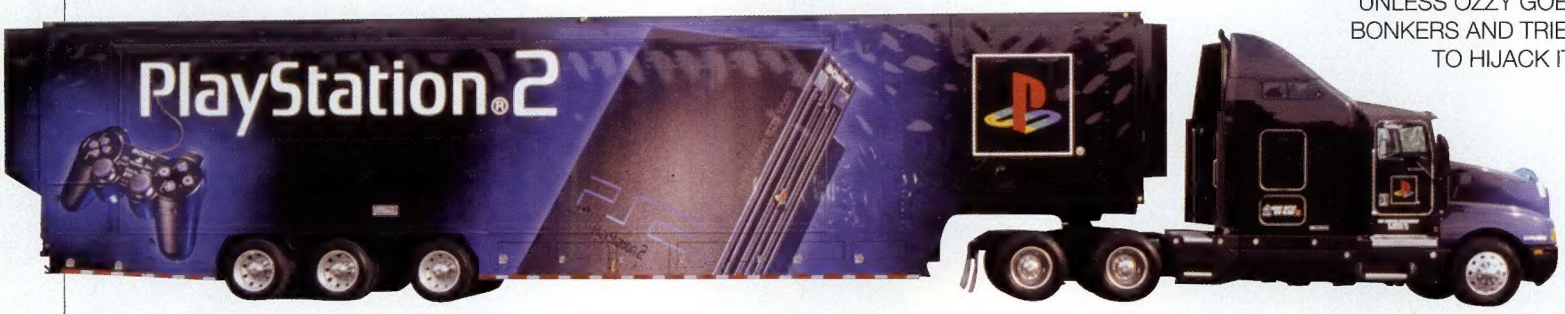
Just what the heavy metal Doctor ordered–Sony games at Ozzfest!

Sony Computer Entertainment will bark at the moon this summer as the title sponsor for Ozzfest 2002, offering head bangers the opportunity to play the hottest new PlayStation 2 games between puking-up stale beer and searching for seven-dollar water.

The Ozzfest 2002 tour kicks off on July 6 in Bristow, Virginia and travels to 28 U.S. markets, featuring Ozzy Osbourne (duh), System of A Down, Rob Zombie, POD, Drowning Pool, Adema, Zakk Wylde's Black Label Society, The Apex Theory, Mushroomhead, Soil and more. Sony will also offer a free trip for two to the final show of the tour in Dallas, Texas on September 8. This free-trip giveaway will include a two-night hotel stay, a PlayStation 2 autographed by Ozzy Osbourne, PlayStation 2 games, reserved tickets to Ozzfest, and the opportunity to meet a participating Ozzfest band and member of the Osbourne family. To enter for the free trip giveaway, visit www.scea.com.

Sony's 68-foot custom-designed RV will be the hub for the gameplay fun and excitement, unless Ozzy goes bonkers and tries to hijack it and head for home, which is now apparently on the Jay Leno show. Rock on.

"SONY'S 68-FOOT CUSTOM-DESIGNED RV WILL BE THE HUB FOR THE GAMEPLAY FUN AND EXCITEMENT, UNLESS OZZY GOES BONKERS AND TRIES TO HIJACK IT"

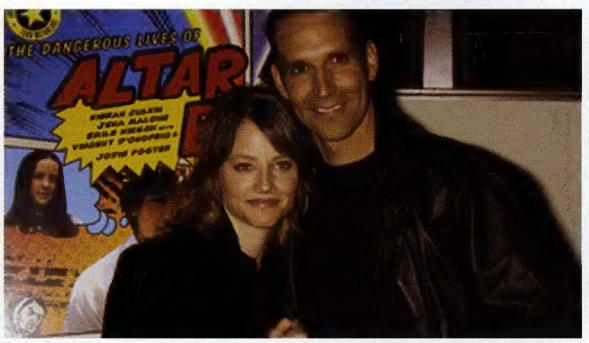


PlayStation 2 Presents Ozzfest 2002 Routing Schedule

Date	Where	Venue
July 6	Bristow, Virginia	Nissan Pavilion
July 7	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Post-Gazette Pavilion
July 10	Scranton, PA	Montage Mountain
July 12	Camden, New Jersey	Tweeter Center
July 13	Hartford, Connecticut	Ctnow.com Amphitheater
July 16,17	Boston, Massachusetts	Tweeter Center
July 19, 20	Holmdel, New Jersey	PNC Center
July 24	Raleigh, North Carolina	Alltel Pavilion
July 25	West Palm Beach, Florida	Mars Music Amphitheater
July 28	Atlanta, Georgia	Hi-Fi Buys Amphitheater
August 3	Columbus, Ohio	Polaris Amphitheater
August 4	Cleveland, Ohio	Blossom Music Center
August 7, 8	Clarkston, Michigan	DTE Energy Center
August 10	Chicago, Illinois	Tweeter Center
August 11	East Troy, Wisconsin	Alpine Valley
August 13	Indianapolis, Indiana	Verizon Amphitheater
August 15	Cincinnati, Ohio	Riverbend Amphitheater
August 17	Somerset, Wisconsin	Float-Rite Park
August 19	St. Louis, Missouri	UMB Bank Pavilion
August 20	Kansas City, Missouri	Sandstone Amphitheater
August 22	Denver, Colorado	Pepsi/City Lights
August 24	Sacramento, California	Autowest Amphitheater
August 25	Mountain View, California	Shoreline Amphitheater
August 27	George, Washington	The Gorge
August 31	Devore, California	Glen Helen Blockbuster Pavilion
September 5	Phoenix, Arizona	Cricket Pavilion
September 7	San Antonio, Texas	Verizon Wireless Amphitheater
September 8	Dallas, Texas	Smirnoff Amphitheater

MCFARLANE'S AN ALTAR BOY

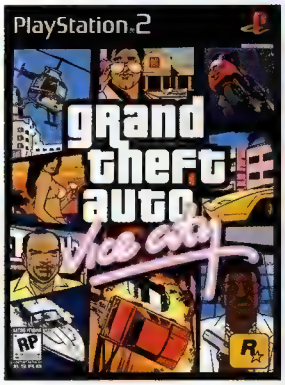
bless me father, for i have sinned, this is my... hey! what the!...



Jodie Foster's *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* is set to open in theaters on June 14, and features nearly 20 minutes of Todd McFarlane animation. *Altar Boys* is an independent film from Think Films and Jodie Foster's Egg Pictures, based on the 1992 debut novel by Chris Fuhrman. Starring Kieran Culkin, Jena Malone, Jodie Foster, Emile Hirsch and Vincent D'Onofrio, the R-rated film is a coming-of-age drama from Peter Care. The main characters are budding comic artists, filmed using the McFarlane comic-style animation as a storytelling device.

SAY HELLO TO MY LEETLE FRIEND...

Miami gets a new sound (and vision) machine



Although Rockstar chose not to show it at E3, development on the next installment of the phenomenon known as the GTA series, GTA: Vice City, is well underway, with the game scheduled to ship October 22. You really can't argue with the decision to not ready a demo for E3, avoiding interruption of the development of a game that will dominate the market regardless. GTA 3 has sold in excess of six million copies worldwide since its release last October, making it the fastest selling, highest grossing PS2 game to date. In terms of the technology behind the new game, Sam Houser, president of Rockstar games, says to expect an even more sprawling, better-looking sequel. "Vice City is going to surpass the efforts of last year, as we set our sights on making an even more revolutionary gaming experience," says Houser. "This will be reflected in the size of the game, the scope of the gameplay, the extent of the gameplayer's freedom, the quality of production value and the all-important sense of style." Series producer Les Benzies adds, "Although it may appear to be a challenge to develop a game superior to Grand Theft Auto 3, our progress to date on Vice City makes me highly confident that we can deliver a truly innovative game."

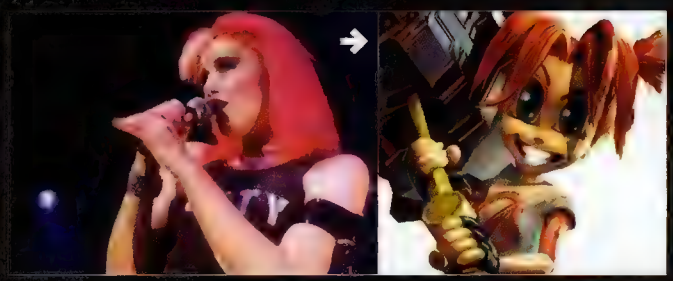
Vice City is an entirely new game set in the '80s, in Vice City, and the vibe is glamour, power and corruption. So, pastel blazers, no socks, speed boats, hair metal? The only question on our minds is whether it will it be as gritty and violent as 3, given the subject matter, so we asked Scarface, who had this to say, "Chu dun't even nid to ask."

Oh, this is going to be good. I say they bury Tubs and Croket in the openeing CG...

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT

Gwen Malice needs a voice, who you gonna' call?

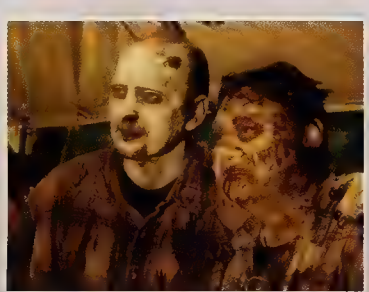
Malice, the spectacular new game from Argonaut/Sierra that graced our May cover, will feature No Doubt's Gwen Stefani as the voice of Malice, and her band mates, Tony Kanal, Tom Dumont, and Adrian Young, as her cronies in the game as they battle the crow militia. The game will also feature three remixed versions of songs from their latest CD, *Rock Steady*. "Having our music in Malice is another way to get our music to people who might not otherwise hear it," said Gwen, who obviously thinks gamers are a bunch of shut-ins without cable, seeing how MTV airs "Hella' Good" and "Hey Baby" every 10 minutes. (Just giving you a hard time, girlie girl.) This is great news for a game that deserves every chance at becoming a sensation, and we can't think of anyone better to play the feisty young Malice than the hyper-cutie Gwen. Perhaps they'll include the game in an upcoming video.



UNDEAD PRESIDENTS

A quick glimpse of The Houes of the Dead feature film

Immediately after the endless walking and sensory overload of E3, one fearless **play** editor fly over the Canadian border to get a behind-the-lens glimpse at *The House of the Dead* movie. The weather was dreary—as Vancouver locals will tell, is always the case; and the atmosphere was infinitely eerie. And to make the situation even stranger, made-up zombies wandered around the muddy set, munching on Krispy Kremes and chatting about their post-*Episode II* impressions. Sega of America President, Peter Moore, and WOW Entertainment President and CEO, Rikiya Nakagawa (creator of upcoming *House of the Dead 3*, to be released simultaneously in the arcade and on Xbox), were also on location—to be transformed into undead executives, nonetheless. Stay tuned to future issues of **play** for a more comprehensive feature about our two-day flesh fair... a bit closer to Halloween, of course.



Apparently Peter Moore wore a lot of makeup to E3...

top 10

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READERS MOST WANTED

1. SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE-GC
2. PANZER DRAGOON ORTA-XBOX
3. HALO 2-XBOX
4. XENOSAGA-PS2
5. SOUL CALIBUR 2-GC
6. SHINOBI-PS2
7. LEGEND OF ZELDA-GC
8. ONIMUSHA 2-PS2
9. KINGDOM HEARTS-PS2
10. PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EP. I & II-GC

READERS TOP TEN

1. RESIDENT EVIL-GC
2. MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE-PS2
3. JET SET RADIO FUTURE-XB
4. FINAL FANTASY X-PS2
5. DEVIL MAY CRY-PS2
6. GUN VALKYRIE-XB
7. SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 2-GBA
8. MAX PAYNE-XB
9. HALO-XB
10. JAK AND DAXTER-PS2

play TOP TEN

1. RESIDENT EVIL-GC
2. JET SET RADIO FUTURE-XB
3. WIPEOUT FUSION-PS2
4. MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE-PS2
5. HUNTER: THE RECKONING-XB
6. SKY GUNNER-PS2
7. THE MARK OF KRI-PS2
8. GUN VALKYRIE-XB
9. FREEKSTYLE-PS2
10. HERDY GERDY-PS2

BEST SELLING JUNE

1. SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE-PS2
2. GRAND THEFT AUTO 3-PS2
3. GRAN TURISMO 3 A-SPEC-PS2
4. RESIDENT EVIL-GC
5. SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE-XB
6. SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 2-GBA
7. SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE-GC
8. VIRTUA FIGHTER 4-PS2
9. ATV OFF ROAD FURY-PS2
10. SONIC ADVANCE-GBA

GAME RELEASE SCHEDULE*

PS2
7/02 CONFLICT ZONE
7/15 THE MARK OF KRI
7/23 COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE
7/23 NCAA FOOTBALL 2003
7/30 AKIRA PSYCHOBALL
7/30 SEGA SPORTS: TENNIS
8/01 V.I.P.
8/06 NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2003
8/06 NFL GAMEDAY 2003
8/06 DISNEY GOLF
8/06 SEGA SPORTS: NCAA COLLEGE FOOTBALL 2K3
8/06 THE THING
8/06 RUN LIKE HELL
8/12 NFL BLITZ 20-03
8/13 FISHERMAN'S BASS CLUB
8/13 MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2
8/13 STREET HOOPS: KING OF THE COURT
8/15 THE TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE
8/15 SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS
8/15 ARMORED CORE 3
8/15 DRAGON'S LAIR 3D
8/16 TUROK: EVOLUTION
8/16 H20VERDRIVE
8/16 NFL QB CLUB 2003
8/16 DUAL HEARTS
8/19 MADDEN NFL 2003
8/20 SIMPSONS SKATEBOARDING
8/21 SEGA SPORTS: NFL 2K3
8/25 JIMMY NEUTRON BOY GENIUS
8/27 TWISTED METAL: BLACK ONLINE

XBOX
7/02 BRUCE LEE: QUEST OF THE DRAGON
7/17 DAVID BECKHAM SOCCER
7/23 BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER
7/23 NCAA FOOTBALL 2003
7/23 CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER
7/23 COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE
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8/30 TUROK: EVOLUTION

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8/20 WORMS WORLD PARTY
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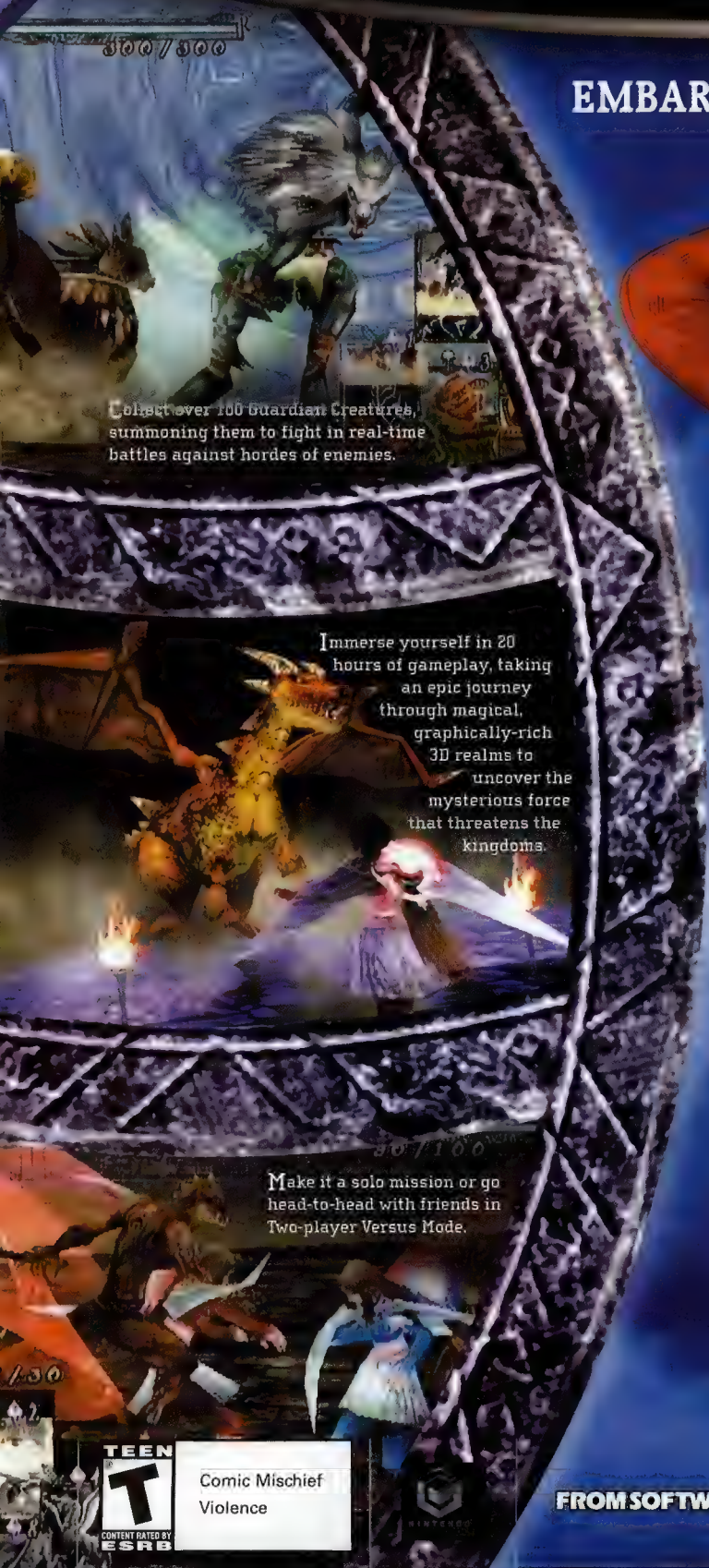

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Violence

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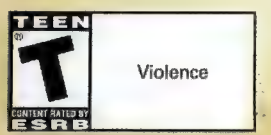

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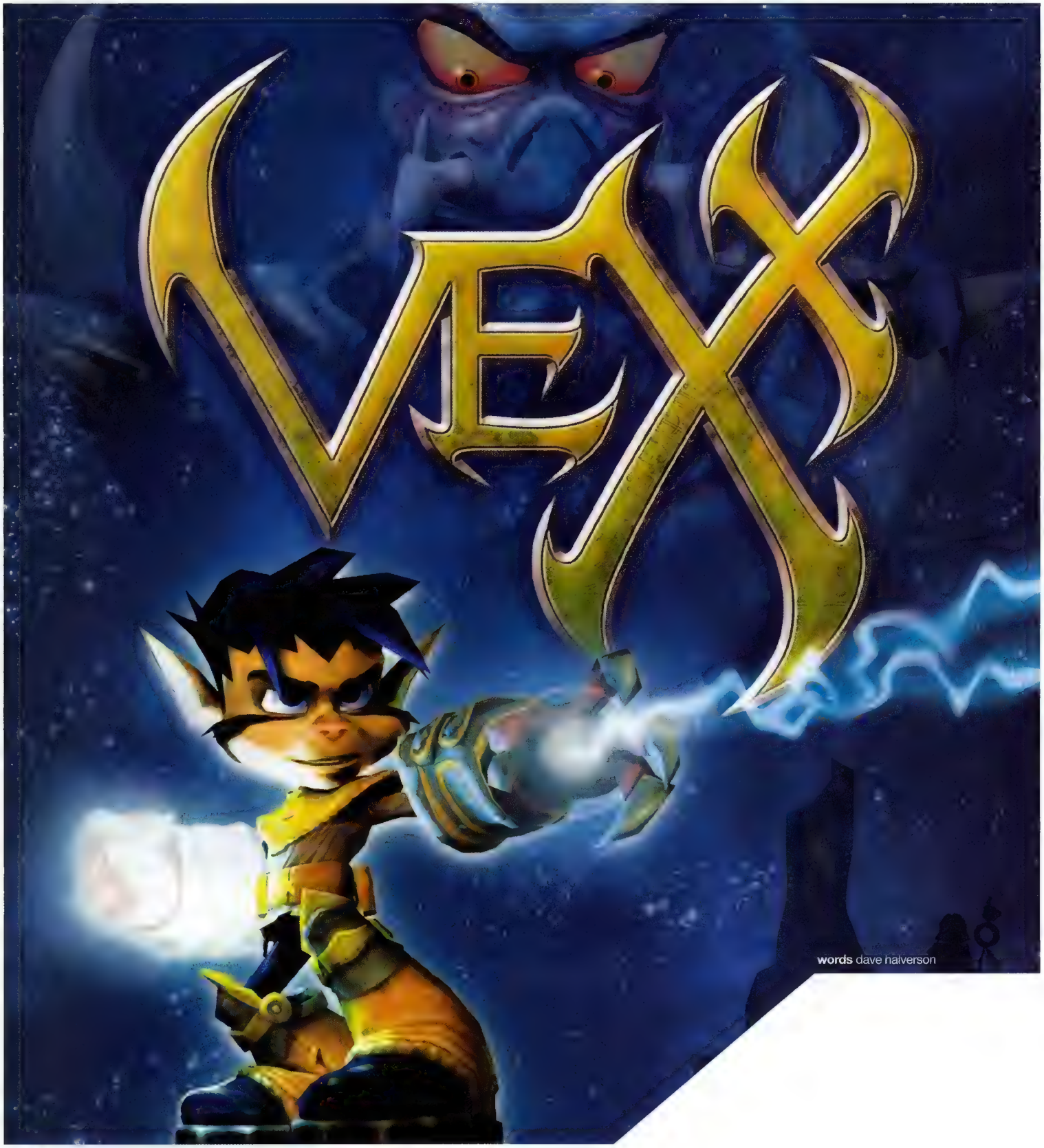
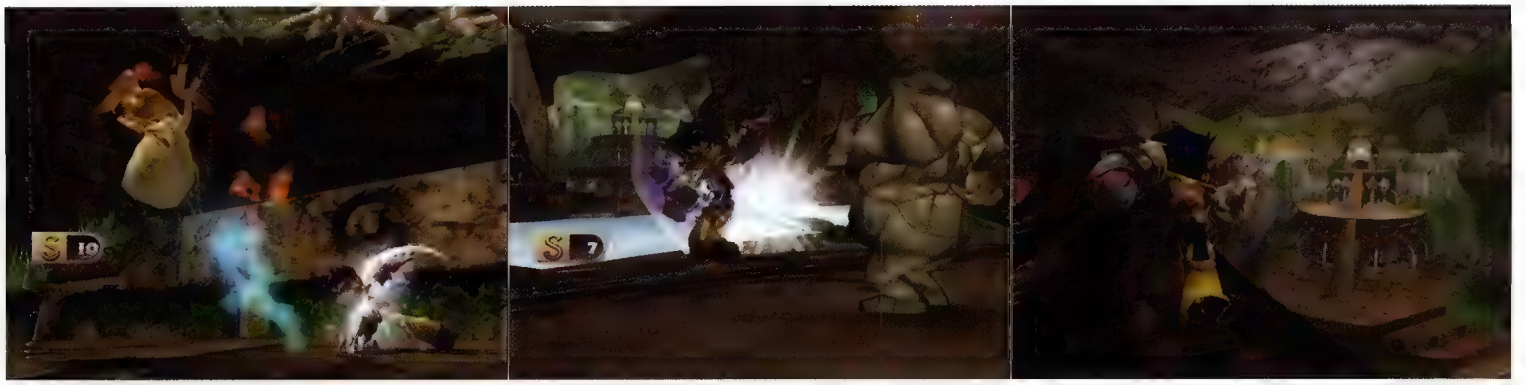


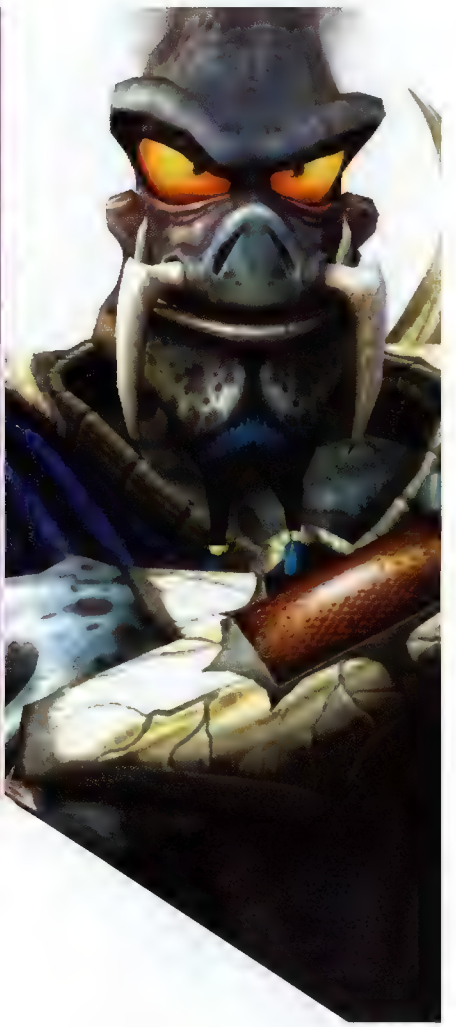
WONDROUS STORY

Acclaim's decidedly dark new entry into the platforming wars greets gamers with a grimace, rather than a grin, and a game bursting with personality and possibilities

words dave halverson



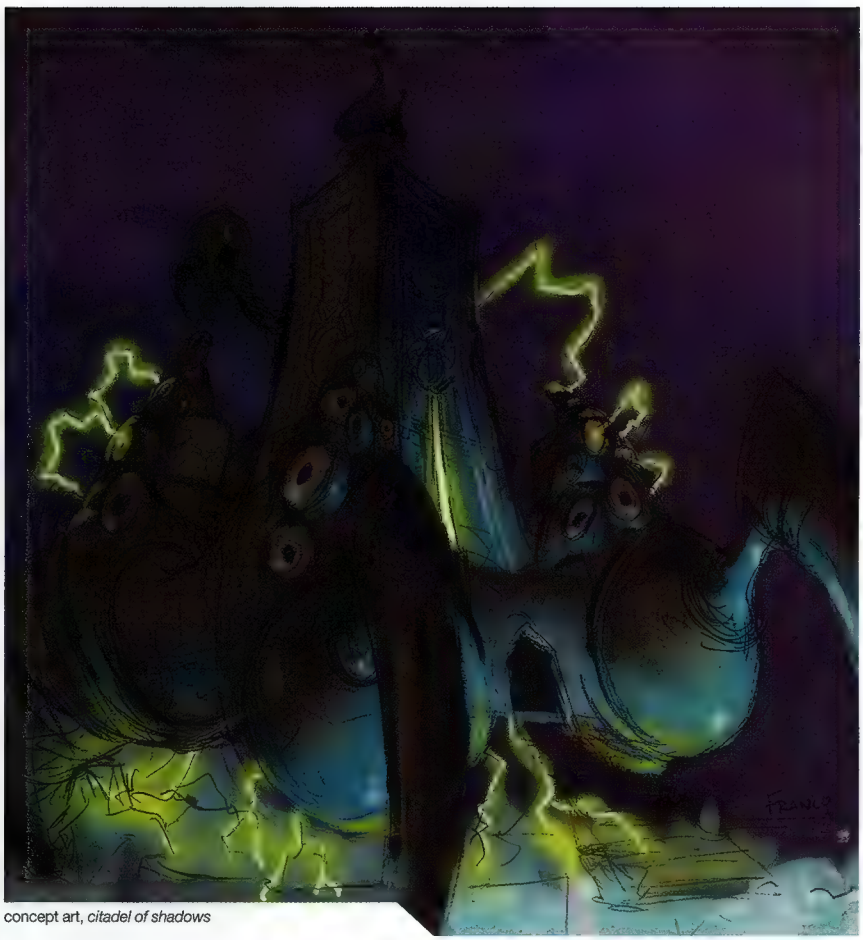
"YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO IMAGINE HOW BIG THE GAME ACTUALLY IS; THERE IS SO MUCH DIVERSITY AND SO MUCH UNEXPECTED STUFF IN HERE..."



It's not my credo to begin a feature with "the story," mainly because they're usually not that interesting and/or don't really serve the game. Neither applies where Vexx is concerned, so once upon a time... The people of the planet Astara, the Astani, were great intellectuals who created a series of rift gates to explore and investigate other realms. In their quest for knowledge, they would blindly open these rifts and leap through to explore other worlds. Seven hundred years ago (in game time; this didn't really happen) they opened a rift to a very dark and evil world. Hordes of the Shadow Race swarmed into Astara and there was a great battle—a battle so fierce that it actually shattered the planet. When it was over, apparently all of the Shadow Race had been killed, but sadly, so had the Astani, leaving orbiting chunks of the world to grow and evolve on their own.

We find Vexx at home in his village, Rockhaven, where we also discover that the Shadow Race has survived. They're being lead by the Shadowraith, Dark Yabu, who comes sweeping down onto the village, enslaving the people, forcing them to work deep in the caves that surround their village.

The rebellious Vexx, however, does not go silently. When his hotheaded temperament infuriates Yabu, as he moves to punish him, Vexx's grandfather steps between them, and Yabu kills him in cold blood. Filled with rage and confused, Vexx escapes onto Yabu's windship, where, as he's exploring the ship, he discovers locked deep within Yabu's sanctum the last pair of Astani Battlegauntlets, fused into rock. When Vexx goes to touch them, they break free and come to life, fusing themselves painfully onto his arms. The resulting reaction destroys the ship, and Vexx, screaming in agony, is thrown, bloody and battered, to the ground below. Barely conscious, Yabu stands over him, figuring him for dead, and proclaims that, as punishment for his deeds, he is going to take his final revenge on the village—and slaughter everyone. With these



concept art, *citadel of shadows*

words, Vexx blacks out. When he comes to, alone and confused, a little old blind hermit, Darby, finds him, and the adventure begins.

Thirty-five people and 30 months later, Acclaim is expecting one very largely clawed new baby boy. Though it's obvious, the hope is that Vexx will become a new staple in the high-stakes business of character-driven, mass-appeal platform games, but first and foremost, Acclaim and their Austin-based game studios are striving to make Vexx the best game of its kind. If the public responds (and you better; I want more of these), Vexx will become Acclaim's new poster child, and the stage is definitely set. The budget: eight million-plus—is certainly indicative of greatness, and the marketing machine is switched on high, with a projected sell-in day one of 1.4 million copies. Most importantly, though, a tightly woven, dedicated team, running like a well-oiled machine, is confident that they have the time, tools and talent to make magic happen.

In the current scheme of things, I liken this to when Mario, Sonic and a slew of critters fought for 16-bit supremacy, back in the mid-to-late nineties. In the new arena of expansive adventure platformers, where Jak and Daxter and soon Ratchet and Clank currently reside (with plenty more on the way), Acclaim has taken the formula and put it under the microscope, carefully examining how to make a game so expansive consistently compelling. The result is a time-sensitive adventure with a more vibrant and alive world than its competition, and an unusual new, young dark-hero. Not that I'm proclaiming Vexx the winner—it's too early for conjecture—I'm just letting you know that that's the plan, and that Acclaim is certainly on the right track. They intend on blowing their competition out of the water. Canopy villages, caves, desert temples, underwater cities, deadly volcanoes, etc...they've got a great story and universe and, considering the way the game designers and artists are working together, success is almost assured.

Acclaim's booth at E3 is a massive structure, connected to a full-size half-pipe on which an MC is perched so loud that I was at the Army stand looking for live sniper rounds. Ducking behind the facades amidst the most electrically charged atmosphere on Earth, I sat down with Dave Dienstbier, creative director on Vexx (and Turok since the first arrow flew), to discuss the inner working of Acclaim's first foray into the critter wars and how it's coming together. Given that Dienstbier's someone I've known and admired for many years and consider one of the best, most dedicated CDs in the business, the notion of him helming such a project is exciting, especially given the fact that Vexx isn't at all cute but, rather, troubled and somewhat pissed at the world.

My initial query as to what will make Vexx stand out in the crowd sparks a candid, confident response: "Out of the 30-month timeline, a lot of that was dedicated to tools and technology. We didn't have an engine and we didn't have a new tool set," explains Dienstbier. "When we started making the tool set, we felt it was important that we didn't have to rely on anything in its final visual form to move on. So all the gameplay, all the challenges, everything that moves in the world we create in the editor—we don't need to have a single piece of art: no environmental elements need to be animated, and we can make every element that's gameplay specific work using simple rectangles or primitives. That means we really get a sense of the gameplay long before it's anything you ever want to show to anyone outside the studio, and that's

concept art, *the below*

very important to us, because that means the designers aren't shoehorning their gameplay in after art treatments come along. It means that they're purists; they don't have to care if it's pretty. They shouldn't have to. It's not our job to make the game beautiful; it's our job to make the game fun. It's the artist's job to make it beautiful. The great thing about the way the tools work is the way that we manage our data. Let's say that I built my proxy world for this world, and I may move onto another. While the artist is doing a treatment for the first, I'm getting the proxy of the next all built out and then he says, 'I'm done with this,' and I'm like, 'Great, have that.' Now I go back to the first world where he's kind of refined the geometry to a certain point, and now I start adding my internals. Everything's moving, everything's working. He can then take his geometry for the world and start adding textures, and making it more pretty, and all I have to do is say, 'Give me the latest version of the world,' and there it is. Everything works, nothing brakes. That means while I'm sitting here making sure this plays well, he's making it pretty. At any time I can see how the pretty stuff is working. When I get the latest version of the world model, it all just goes bink! Doesn't change any platforms; doesn't change any internals I've set up."

Surely the artists must have a grasp of polygon limitations to keep the frame rate smooth?

"The limits were established at the onset of the project, so the artist's know exactly what their polygon budget is for the entire world," Dienstbier points out. You see, like a well-oiled machine.

[About now the door opens and in walks Thomas Coles, Vexx lead designer.] "There he is! You procrastinating bastard! Wait a minute, his recorder is on," observes Dienstbier.

Don't worry, I won't print that...maybe.

Continues Dienstbier: "I also want to give you an idea of the darkness in the game, because it's big. At night time, when everything changes, there are certain points along the way that you're actually going to be able to hear the last screams of all the Astani that were killed in the battle. So you're gonna hear children crying out for their mommies, 'Why isn't daddy moving?' All this stuff, you'll hear the wraifs as they're devouring and attacking. That kind of gives you this goose-bumps feeling."

How long is a 24-hour cycle, game-time?

"Ninety minutes for one whole loop: 50 day, 20 sunset/sunrise and 20 of straight dark," explains Coles. "The whole game world cycles. You see the sun move overhead, the moon comes up, everything gets darker; the lighting changes on everything."

Do levels play differently depending on when you get there?

"Yes, well, especially since every creature in the game has a daytime and nighttime version and the nighttime versions are much more difficult. A lot are faster then you are, for one thing, so you can't run away, and they have more hit points, so it ups the gameplay anty in the game," says Coles. "If you think about how a lot of games play out, you begin to get kind of numb because you learn a few skills and there's no peaks or lulls. One of the things we realized about good gamemaking is, some games are just extreme carnage nonstop, but after 30 minutes, it's not carnage anymore. We really want to give the player the experience of feeling that tempo—up and down—so daytime is a little more platfrom-puzzle oriented and night, more intense."

Dienstbier chimes in: "The fun thing is that, in the game world, if the player decides, I like it at night, all he has to do is find a sun dial, jump on it, and turn it to midnight. You'll see all the lighting change and all the enemies morph."

Are there a lot of these?

"There's only one in each world," continues Dienstbier. "We wanted to make it a thing where you kind of have to earn your way to find it. It really comes down to what you want to use it for. We don't want to give you a gift and say, 'Well, if you don't like playing at night, you never have to.' But you'll actually have nightfall, so players who aren't particularly good at fighting at night will be like, 'I've got to get out of here' kind-of-thing. Of course, certain challenges are only doable at certain times of the day, so time is a major component in the game. Of 144 objectives in the game, I'd say only 15 can only be done at particular times."

Is this at all linear? Are you following a set path? Or do you have to go to a place and complete it before you go to the next?

"Not really." [They both laugh diabolically in unison.] "We like the Mario/Banjo style better then what we've seen in a lot of games," Coles says. "This is an exploration game, but we wanted some linearity to it because if you don't have any, you can't tell any story at all, because you never know where the player is going to be. So we created five choke points in the game and divided the game into six worlds, so you have to complete a certain number of tasks per world to move onto the next one. However, to get out of the first world, there's 24 possible tasks to choose from, but you only have to complete five to go to the second. So by that time you may have looked around a little and said, 'Okay, cool, I'll come back for this and that.' It's very, very hard for us to do this well because...well, I think we've done it well. It's a hard thing to do because a lot of the games we're seeing out there right now are very internalized in terms of their complexity. Most of the complexity exists inside the character and what he can do, and the number of internals they have in the game are fairly limited. So what they do is give you a linear series of events. All of the complexities are internalized in what the player can do. In the Mario and Banjo style, if you think back, everything is unique. You don't have the luxury of saying, 'Well okay, I'm gonna give you this configuration of things to beat.' It's a destination you have to go to for something special, so that's what exploration's about. It makes our task very interesting when you have to come up with that many discreet objectives and make all of them interesting. Rather than say, 'Okay, this machine with this creature—now I test that. Okay, that's pretty fun. This sized gap with these two creatures...' For instance, one of the objectives in the game involves this giant stone golem. You don't know what he is, but he's watching you from a distance. You run up and this giant stone hand comes up with this cube with six colored faces on it. Within this cube you see a portal, so you jump inside and you see the M.C. Escher paintings with all the crazy upside-down staircases. We actually had to rebuild the level six times in six orientations and you have to visit each of them. It's like, I could get to that one if only I could just flip to the green side—and that's just one objective."

Dienstbier adds: "As you play through the game, there's so much of this purely unexpected stuff. What we found was that just the raw imagination of some of the games, in terms of what you're doing and why you're doing it, are often constrained by trying to create some kind of plausible reason why you would be doing it. Well, in this world, you know, we have these things... Okay, that's how they get power so, to power it up, I have to start those things to do this. And that's how we build some of our tasks. The team was very attracted to just throwing context out the window, because who cares why there's a giant hand with a cube on it? It's a world that's created to spark your imagination. We don't want to have to explain why that moves that way, or why that's floating in the air because, well, gamers just accept

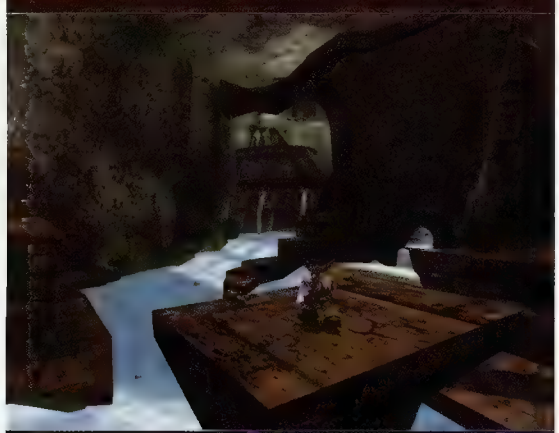
"AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THE WORLD NOT ONLY ARE YOU GOING TO SEE THE ENTIRETY OF THE WORLD YOU'RE EXPLORING AROUND YOU, BUT YOU CAN LOOK ACROSS SPACE AND SEE ANOTHER WORLD THAT YOU'RE GOING TO PLAY, AND WHEN YOU GO TO THAT WORLD, LOOK BACK AT THE WORLD YOU JUST VISITED. EVERYBODY'S GOT DISTANT HORIZONS—WE WANTED TO CREATE A SENSE OF WONDER."

these things. And if they don't, then... That's why we play games, they're an escape. You want to get immersed in a world with a sense of wonder. If everything's explained, it's no fun. I like games that different players can perceive and conquer in different ways."

"As soon as you start listening to context too much, and we've seen a lot of North American developers in particular have a little bit harder time with this... If you look at your European games, they can be a little wacky and, of course, the Japanese will just let creativity blossom," Coles points out. "This game is built for gamers. It's definitely for people that acquired skills playing games like Mario and Banjo in the past... you know how

"WE SEE VEXX AS MORE OF A WOLVERINE CHARACTER THAN A MARIO CHARACTER"

to use a camera. One thing we saw that Mario 64 did that none of the other games have done is, they didn't put in a double jump. You lined yourself up and you took your shot. And if you think about what that does to the player... Again, about the whole up-tempo, down-tempo thing, you get this rush of 'Crap!' when you jump, because you can't just bail. In most of the other games, you don't even worry, it's like, 'Ah, somewhere close.' Our character is an acrobat, it's all ballistic. I think we're gonna get a lot of that good balance, of the frustration you got from Mario. Anything worth doing isn't necessarily easy. A lot of the games that are easy you just don't get that



"THERE ARE PRIMARY AREAS AND CHALLENGES IN EACH OF THESE GAME WORLDS, BUT THERE'S A LOT OF LITTLE HIDDEN STUFF... A BALL IS STUCK IN A TREE, IT'S NOT JUST THERE, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR THE PLAYER TO DISCOVER."

with this character.

"Hoping to," says Dienstbier.

"It's the player's choice," adds Coles. "I mean, we were asked to create something iconic for the company, but when we started out, we said, 'You can't do that because it's not our choice.' It really comes down to, if the consumer likes it... So we literally pulled back, and started doing character design. The first two months we did nothing but character concept and nobody could see it because everyone was identifying with Crash and Sonic and Mario—those larger-than-life characters engraved in your brain. When you look at somebody's sketch, it's very difficult to see a character, you know, on par with these icons. So we were like, we're gonna fail if we try to do this. We're gonna end up with some market-happy character that we put all of these things on, thinking that it's what the consumer wants. So we actually threw the character out and said, 'You build us a proxy character; we don't care what he looks like. And, you start animating him.' And we just started playing and started evolving that model into a final play mechanism. We didn't have a character until December of that year, over a year into the project. Parameters were set—size, weight, speed etc—and Vexx got underway."

So the game itself and the universe, along with some focus testing, really evolved Vexx into what he is today, making him purely a product of his environment. In regards to how the three versions differ, you're obviously bump mapping on the Xbox version.

"Nope, we started doing bump mapping, and I come out of a technical art background, and I had to pull it because you can't tell the difference between bump mapping and baked-in lighting unless you're doing a lot of dynamic lighting," explains Coles. "If you see a light go streaking bye, you can see a ripple effect, but you can get stuff that looks exactly like a bump map if you're not moving the light. So then the question becomes – and I've seen this on the floor in other games I won't mention – is it worth the frame-rate hit to bump map? There are artistic choices you make, but you know what? Grab any screenshot—okay, forget the bump map, and you can create the exact duplicate of that screen shot with no bump map by baking bumps into the lighting. On the day it becomes free in the hardware and it doesn't slow the game down—absolutely."

[We talk about merchandising, how the Turok figures sucked and, if Vexx takes off, how cool it would be to have McFarlane do the toys. I even meet the head of marketing, running the gamut of Vexx's support team, which also gives me a great sense of how far Acclaim has come as a company over the past few years. Corporate and creative actually working together and understanding each other is always great to see.

Before we all disappear back into the abyss of E3, Dienstbier says something I find particularly profound at this point in the evolution of game design.]

"We make the Turok games, and we continue to make the Turok games, and if you look at it, we continue to push hard to do exceptional work," begins Dienstbier. "But you have to be willing to branch out and take a certain amount of risks and to not limit the types of games you're willing to explore too quickly, because then people lose their passion for their work, and that means we're not breaking the kind of barriers that we should as a creative industry, or as a creative group. And that's why I care so much about making sure that Vexx works, and that everybody is happy with it. To tell you the truth, we have never once been told to hamstring the gameplay or the abilities of the character or anything like that, because everybody gets it."

NINTENDO GAMECUBE | PS2 | XBOX

VEXX

preview

developer: **acclaim studios austin**
publisher: **acclaim**
available: **september**

Acclaim's entry into the platforming franchise wars has a good chance of stealing the show down the road. Vexx is a glorious game in both concept and execution.

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Blood and Gore
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E3 2002

Location: Los Angeles Convention Center
Date: May 22-24
Purpose: See and play a ridiculous amount of games

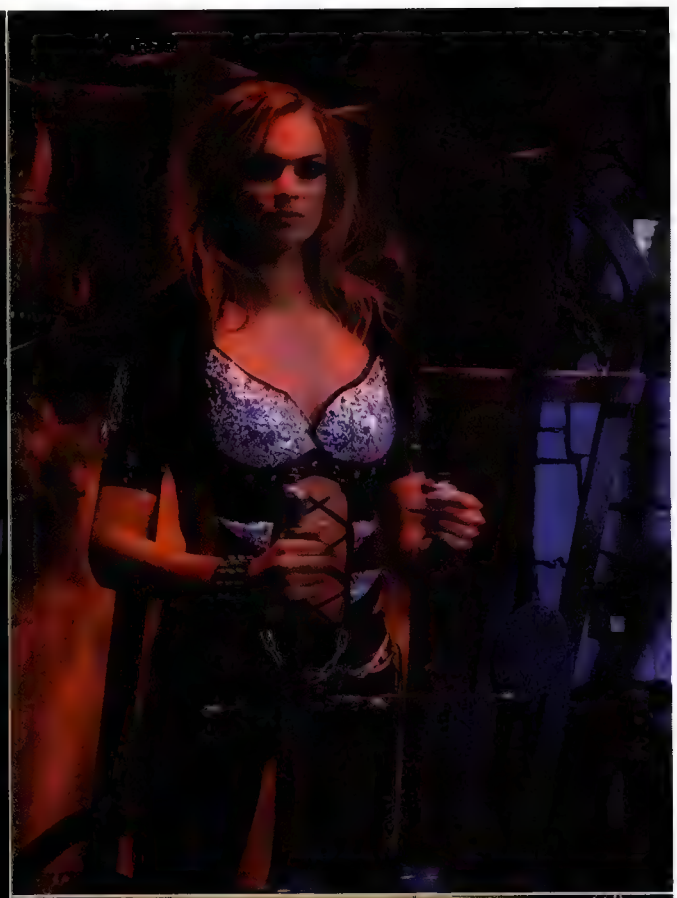
We came, we saw and, whenever possible, we played. A big part of each editor's E3 experience hinged on what each one of us played most, tend to like best; who treated us the nicest and, of course, promises promises! Oh yeah, we're also authorities on the subject. So sit back and enjoy our picks for the best games of E3 (in alphabetical order).

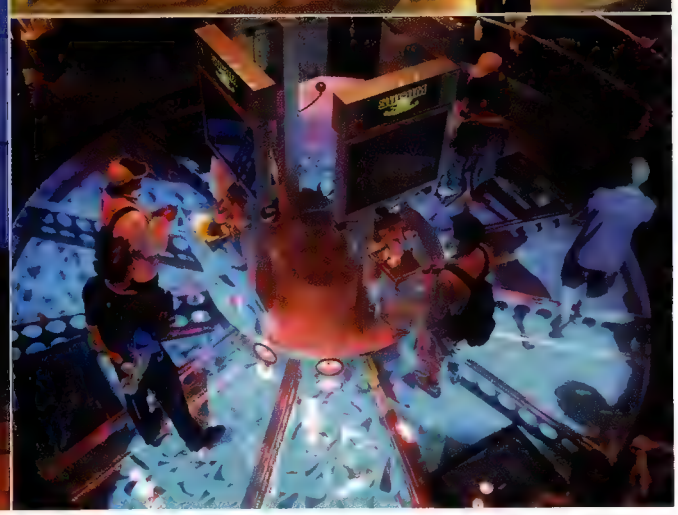
Warning! E3 lists are highly subjective and have been known to cause nervousness, loss of appetite, minor cramping and sleeplessness. Do not operate a motor vehicle while reading this coverage. Portions of this broadcast not suitable for young children. No animals were harmed in the making of this feature...well, except for those Chicken McNuggets we ate.

event coverage / **play** magazine staff

West Hall Entrance

South Hall Entrance





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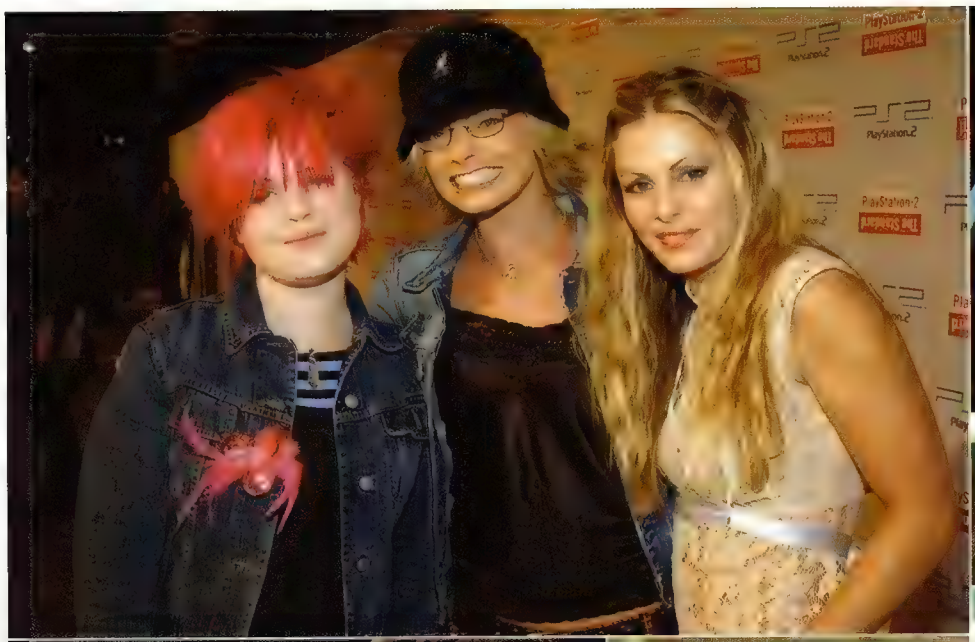
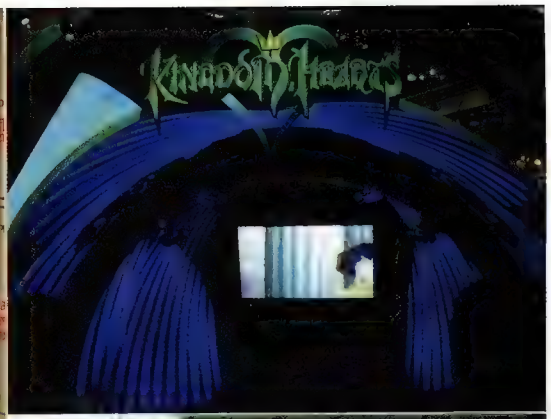

PlayStation.2


KINGDOM HEARTS

PROJECT BG&E (working title)

system: **gc, ps2** / developer: **ubi soft** / publisher: **ubi soft** / available: **2003**

One of the most unexpected gems in a treasure chest so overflowing that we're still trying to sift through all the unprecedented goodness, BG and E instantly endeared itself with the kind of bold imagination and distinct wonder that typically lives in the best of the French design strokes. Guiding the brush is the incomparable Michel Ancel, who gave life to Rayman and is now taking his past sensibilities and experiences into this extraordinary new territory.

The spirit of Rayman may live in this latest adventure, but the ambition driving Project BG&E is remarkably scaled up, and the game exists as a completely new experience. Existing in a place of warm fantasy and dreamy spirit, you have the freedom to explore nearly everything you come across. You fly to villages, ascend the mountains, cover the waters and dive to a mysterious world underneath. With the power of advanced flight, the moon even becomes a destination for survival. BG&E doesn't stop with the free-world concept; it goes free-universe. This one's special.

BRADY FIECHTER

THE ARTISTICALLY ACCOMPLISHED BG&E HINTS OF GREATNESS...

Interview

A Q&A with BG&E and Rayman creator Michel Ancel (interview courtesy of Ubi Soft)

What were you setting out to do when you started this project?
We wanted to pack a whole universe onto a single CD—mountains, planets, towns. The idea was to make the player feel like an explorer, with a sense of absolute freedom.

BG&E is an original creation. What were your sources of inspiration?
First and foremost, everyday life—being able to get in a vehicle, move around freely, [illegible] models: Miyamoto's efficiency and Hayao Miyazaki's free spirit.

You developed a new engine called Jade. Without going into too much technical detail, could you tell us what's so revolutionary about it?
It's an engine that's very powerful and, above all, extremely versatile. Its main strength is its ergonomics, its tools. They allow you to be ambitious and they make it easy to try out a lot of ideas. Its second strength is its ability to adapt to any kind of gameplay—exploring on foot, in a vessel, a vehicle, in a crowd. In addition to that versatility, the [illegible] 100%.

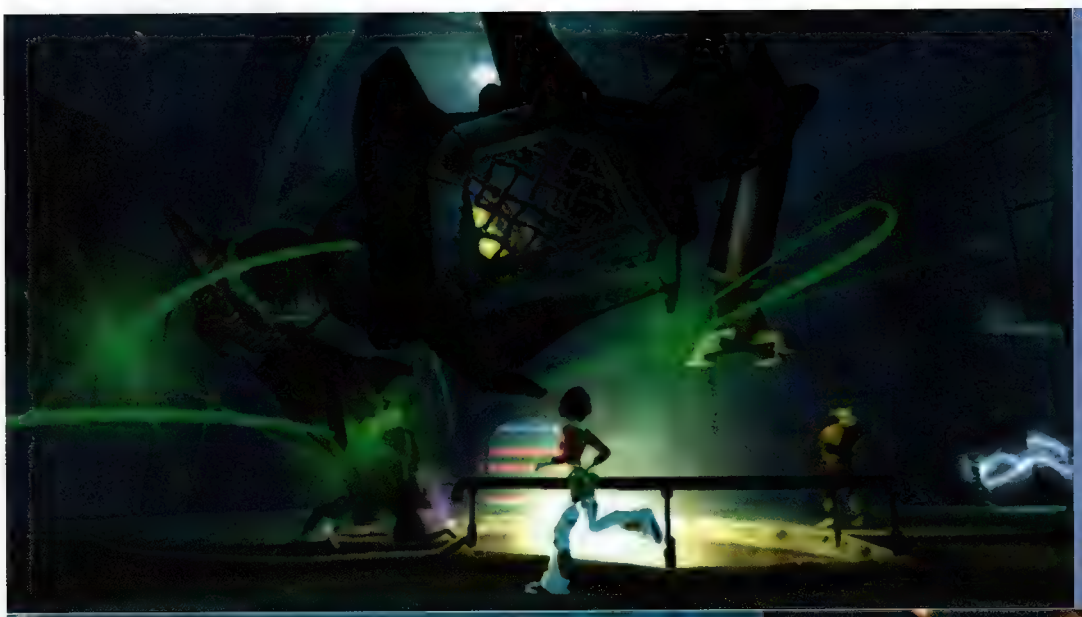
How did you put together the development team?
That's a long, rich and eventful story! Our team's made up of around 30 people from all walks of life. There are self-taught people, engineers, authors of comic strips—each and every one of them made an essential contribution to the production of the game.

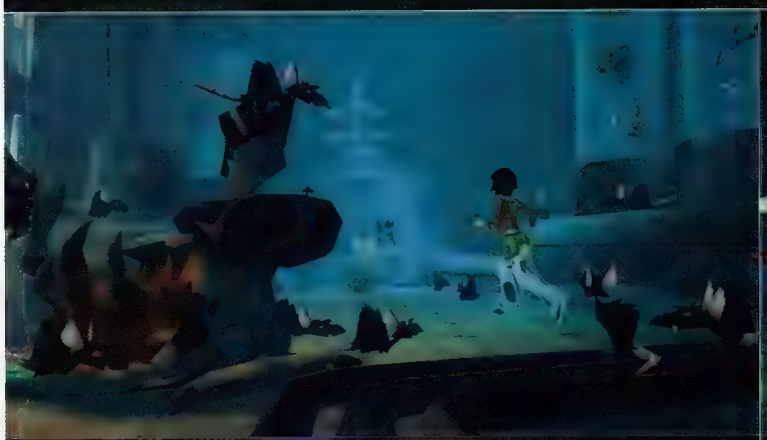
Can you tell us about the background of the team leaders?
Jacques, who's co-producer, has many years' experience in cartoons. He worked as animation director on Rayman 2. Frederic, who runs the AI programming, comes out of the good old game school. He's programmed many games on SNES, Genesis. He was also behind the Rayman series. Bertrand, who's in charge of level design, is self-taught in the arts and technical skills. Christophe, our senior programmer, is the former lead programmer on Rayman 2 and he was behind the development of the Jade engine. Patrick, animation director, has worked on major cartoon movie productions. Paul, senior artist, is also self-taught. He created most of the decors and characters in our [illegible] world. She's created a lot of characters since the first Rayman games. Christophe is in charge of creating the game's original soundtrack. He used to compose the music and sound background for many short and feature-length movies before winning prizes, mainly at the Annecy animation festival. The programming team is self-led. Its members have very different backgrounds, but they all have many years' experience in video games.

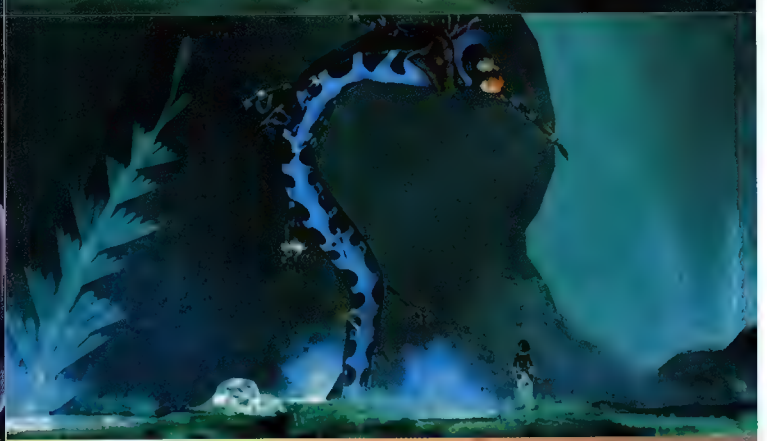
If you had to sum up your project in one sentence, what would you say?
With this game we wanted to give the player "a promise of discovery"...

"Japanese designers were our role models: Miyamoto's efficiency and Hayao Miyazaki's free spirit."

-Michel Ancel, creator BG&E, Rayman







Blinx: The Time Sweeper

system: **xbox** / developer: **artoon** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **september**

There's almost nothing better than being blindsided by a near complete game that you had no idea even existed—especially when it comes from a developer (Artoon) co-founded by Naoto Ohshima, one of the masters behind Sonic the Hedgehog and former member of Sonic Team, creators of a few games you may recognize like the Sonic series, NiGHTS, and Burning Rangers. Blinx The Time Sweeper caught a lot of people by surprise, as well it should. How often do you see a fat cat straight out of Alice in Wonderland, dressed in future garb, sucking up trash and manipulating time? Never? Exactly—and trust me, it's amazing. We're talking real fur here, people, and some of the most innovative gameplay on display at E3 . Using his T1000, Blinx collects lost time crystals before they cause glitches in time, among many, many other things, which I'll write volumes on later. He's also, er, saving a princess...but who hasn't? Cats were bound to get in on the action sooner or later. As [illegible] exceeds the visuals. Blinx is hovering at the top of my list for game of the year. DAVE HALVERSON

[illegible] SAND WORDS" COMES TO MIND...

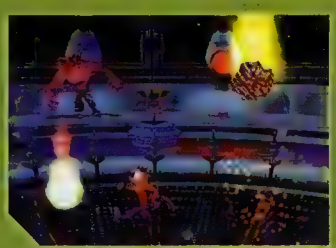
The ability to manipulate time in real-time is truly an experience like no other, making Blinx a truly innovative experience.

The Bandicoot's running with a whole new crowd.

XBOX

UNIVERSAL INTERACTIVE

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Violence



CRASH BANDICOOT THE WRATH OF CORTEX

Crash. Maxed.

crashbandicoot.com

Here comes Crash, in the biggest character-based game to hit Xbox. The Wrath of Cortex. Lightning-fast load times. Super-enhanced graphics. Fully detailed environments. He's really going all out for this one.

"Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex" interactive game © 2002 Universal Interactive, Inc. Crash Bandicoot and related characters ™ & © Universal Interactive, Inc. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft.

Contra: Shattered Soldier

system: ps2 / developer: kcet / publisher: konami / available: fall

Three words: Oh-my-God. Staring up at Konami's massive video screen the day before the show opened, my knees buckled as the Contra movie burned into my brain. We tend to use the term "old-school" loosely these days; seeing Contra on PS2 has changed my point of view. Suddenly old-school equates to the freshest, best pure gaming experience at E3—2D is born again, old is suddenly new again. As brutally hard as it was on SNES and Genesis, Contra now looks completely intense, with massive bosses, gorgeous effects, and rendered backgrounds that will make any hardcore gamer weep. This is old-school Japanese Contra from the original creators, juiced to unholy proportions. It's also proof of how much 3D gaming has numbed our brains. Better dust off Hard Corps and start practicing now. DAVE HALVERSON

ONE OF THE BEST GAMES AT THE SHOW IS ALSO ONE OF THE BIGGEST SURPRISES

I bet you've never imagined Contra to come out looking quite like this. Don't ask how; just accept the glory of 2D action gameplay.

KOEI

www.koeigames.com

THE COLLAPSE OF A DYNASTY...
THE EVOLUTION OF A SERIES!

Romance of The Three Kingdoms VII

Plan tactics and troop formations with the new Strategy Screen!

Storm the castle, smash the gates, and claim victory!

- Live your own Three Kingdoms experience! Play one of 535 characters, from civil servant to the mighty Lu Bu!
- 10 scenarios with multiple endings and story paths! The fate of a nation is in your hands!
- The biggest leap forward in the series! Amazing graphics, quicker gameplay, and added features!

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

KOEI

PlayStation 2

Gungrave

[illegible] Sega game looking and possibly [illegible] hardcore gamer is Gungrave, a slow, lumbering, bone-crunchingly violent arcade shooter featuring character designs from renowned anime artist Yasuomi Mase of *TRIGUN* fame. The lead character, Grave, is back from the dead on a mission of revenge, and he dispenses it with a vengeance. Destructible environments, bullet-riddled nipples, and intense special attacks that threaten to shatter the screen drive home a visual feast that spells "guilty pleasure." In short, Gungrave is an acquired taste, with its unexpectedly wacky control scheme and hard-to-master gameplay, but once you take to its hyper-violent roots, you'll be glued to every pulverizing moment. The other magazines pull their punches, but we think Gungrave rules. Ha ha. DAVE HALVERSON

GUNGRAVE IS NOT YOUR AVERAGE SHOOTER. OH NO. IT POUNDS ITS MESSAGE HOME.

A slow, methodical, pulsing arcade-shooter brimming with earth-shattering death and destruction, and enough firepower to melt down your Dual Shock.

Metroid Prime

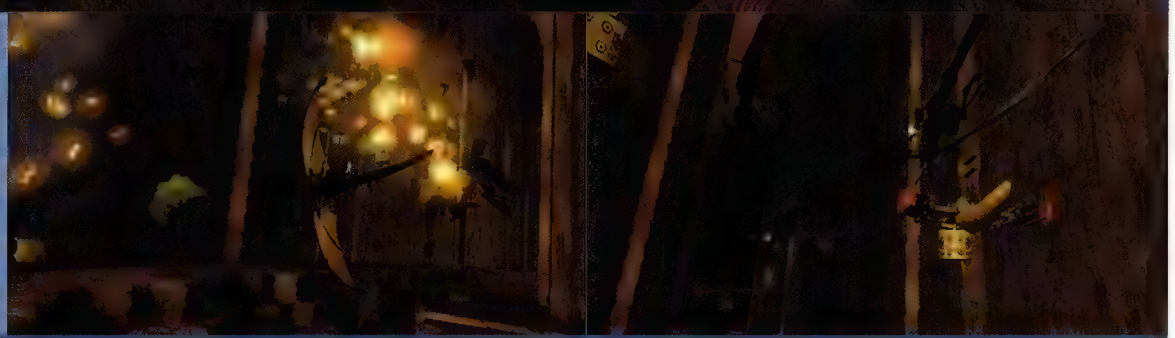
FORGET THE SACRILEGE OF THE PERSPECTIVE CHANGE. THIS GAME WORKS IN FIRST PERSON.

Shigeru Miyamoto on Metroid Prime

Metroid has always had a wonderful, almost dark sci-fi feel, and Prime is no different. Only now, it's gorgeous.

Panzer Dragoon Orta

"IT'S EVERYTHING WE IMAGINED IT WOULD BE. EVERYTHING IT SHOULD BE."



Poetry in elegant motion.

Interview

An E3 behind-the-scenes Q&A with Panzer Dragoon Orta producer Kawagoe Takayuki

Will you be integrating more story elements into Orta?
Like the first two Saturn games, the focus is on action, although we do link events with story.
Is this a sequel or prequel?
Orta takes place two decades after Panzer Dragoon Saga.
Are the games linked?
Although the empire has fallen, yes.
What has the Xbox allowed you to do differently with this version?
We wouldn't have even made this game if not for the Xbox.
Okay, we now really love Xbox.
The main thing is the dragon's ability to morph real time.
So the reason you never made a sequel before this was because you didn't want to compromise the series?
Yes
Are you doing anything to take advantage of the Xbox audio capabilities?
We are yes. We're maximizing it's potential in every aspect of the game.
The new character designs are amazing. Are they from the same person?
You know team Andromeda?
Know them? We love them!
On the whole we have 30 members on the team, 10 are from Andromeda. We've also got the director and main designer from Jet Set Radio Future.
We're still playing JSRF, it's truly magnificent. Will there be more?
Thank you--We would love to do it, but it's up to SoA.
Shooters are normally so abrupt. How do you make yours so dramatic?
We are concentrating on a system which creates a unique flow, the way we orchestrate each main battle, positioning Orta in dynamic ways.
And the drama?
We are influenced a lot by American movies.
Really? They're not that good.
Well, not all from American movies, but I've learned a lot.
Any Gun Valkyrie team members working on Orta?
No, they are busy...
A sequel?
No, we heard that some American press said it was too hard for American players...
That's because they suck at games--make a sequel. We'll get the word out to the right people...
Mmmmm...[he stares at our Sega rep]. I tell him to send hard core games only to play. I think Takayuki agrees that's a good idea.

"We wouldn't have even made this game if not for the Xbox."

-Kawagoe Takayuki, producer, Panzer Dragoon Orta

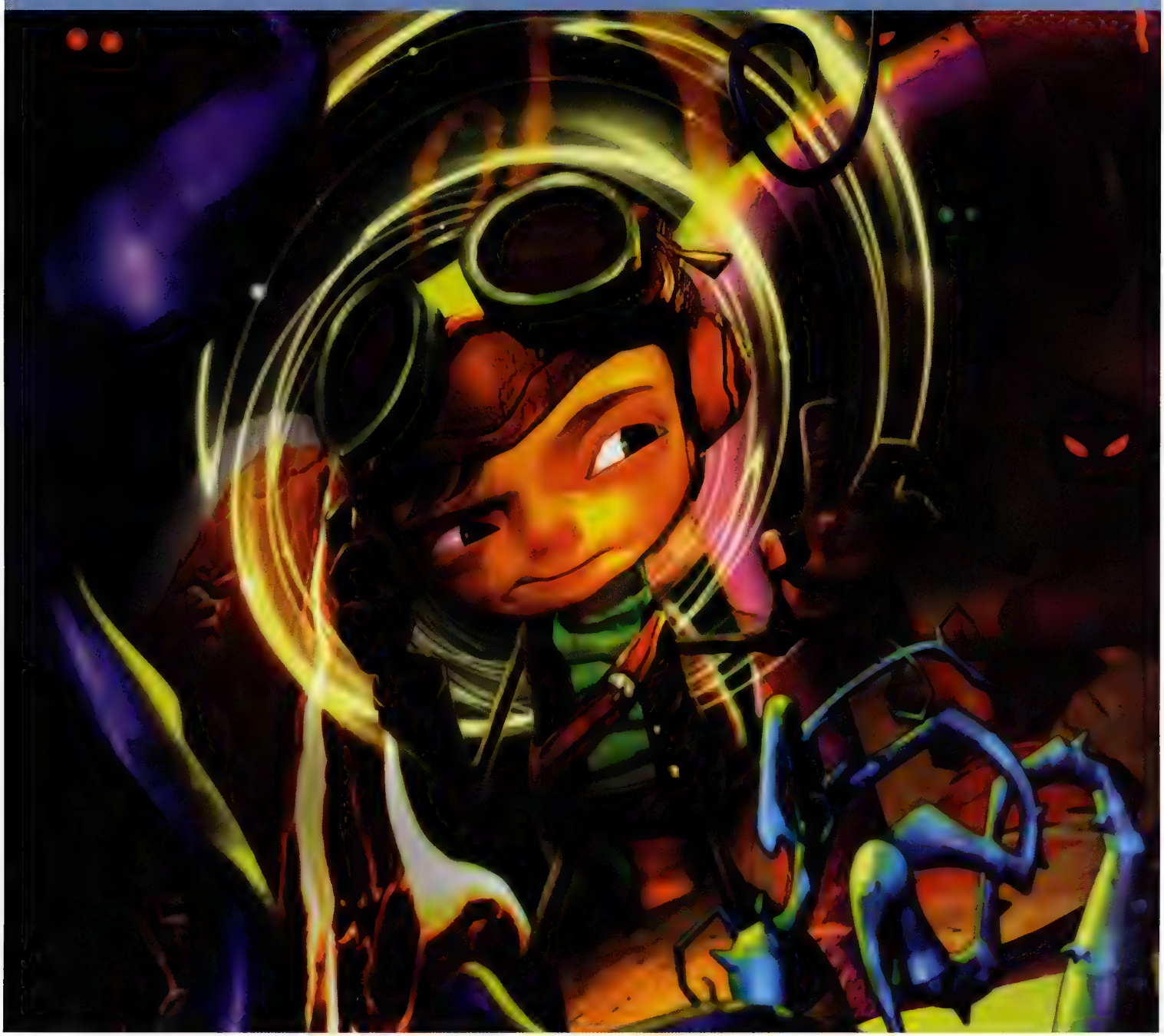
Psychonauts

system: **xbox** / developer: **double fine** / publisher: **microsoft** available: **2003**

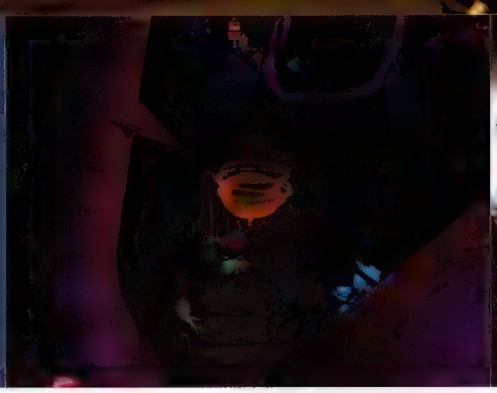
What if I were to tell you that Tim Schafer, the man behind such legendary epics as Monkey Island and Grim Fandango, had turned his sites to platforming, only with a psychological twist, and Invader Zim character designer Jonhen Vasquez in tow? Would you not freak? Well commence freaking, because you're not dreaming. Not content anywhere near convention TS and company have created [illegible] to be believed. Of course, the game is lacquered in Burton-esque visuals, a hyper mutated cast of [illegible] The play mechanics [illegible] innovative, and combined with the theme and visual presentation, send your fantasy genes into over-[illegible] Xbox. Games like Psychonauts, Blinx, and Tork shine a brilliant light on the future of the Big Green.

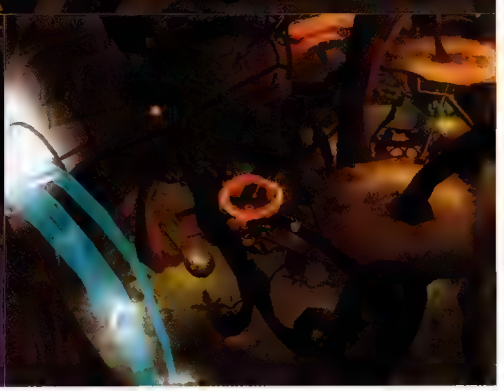
DAVE HALVERSON

WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT PSYCHONAUTS?
TIM SCHAFER'S LATEST IS ACTION-ADVENTURE REBORN.



Every element of Psychonauts– from the action to the storytelling— is bent in such a way as to draw you into its web.





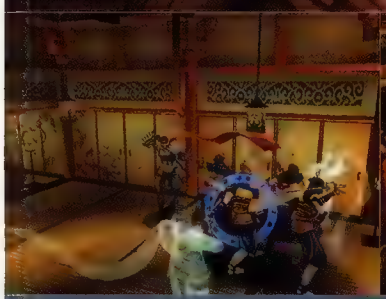
Shinobi

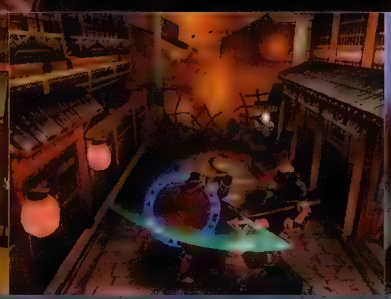
[illegible]

Smashing in an hour early, beside the point, I made my way around an [illegible] queue taking in the spectacle of the indoor city the game industry constructs to celebrate each year. The monitors at Nintendo were dark, and Sony had a parade of vacuums going, sucking up the residue from the construction of their behemoth, but none of that mattered because I was headed directly for Sega anyway to see Shinobi. Let me just say this: as great as '79 Bit was, and I loved it more than most, nostalgia has nothing on the new Shinobi. Not only is Hotsuma as nimble and graceful as Joe Musashi ever was, but he looks positively devilish with his flowing blood red scarf floating and reacting to each and every move he makes. Wall-running, auto-targeting and cinematic combos were all jammed in to what amounted to a training level, but it was enough to restore the character's name to [illegible] back, and better than ever. DAVE HALVERSON

ALL THE STYLE AND GRACE OF THE ORIGINAL MET WITH STUNNING 3D GAMEPLAY AND BLESSED NEW MOVES. SHINOBI IS BACK.

Let the red scarf fly! Combo attacks, wall running, and electric shuriken spray are only the beginning; the stages themselves are the stuff of Shinobi legend.





Interview

An E3 behind the scenes Q&A with Shinobi producer Takashi Uriu and Overworks President and CEO Noriyoshi Ohba (pictured)

We just played the demo! Thank you! It's gorgeous and we love the scarf...
Takashi: Thank you very much.
So, if you go to the options screen and wait, do you get unlimited shurikens?
Noriyoshi: [laughs and nods] I'll think about it.
The double jump and shuriken throw is in there.
Takashi: Yes, it's different though, it shocks them and holds them so you can unleash a devastating attack.
What would you say is the ratio of platforming vs. action?
Takashi: Jumping has always run through every version, and we don't want to lose that–it is a critical point in all Shinobi's. We've added wall running too. In the show version the map is flat but in the future you will see buildings, towers, and caves where you will need to use wall running and double jumping to clear the stages.
Beautiful. Will there be a freeway level?
Noriyoshi: [he can't believe we remember] No, not this time, but the levels will get increasingly more complicated and difficult as you progress.
Is this a sequel, side story?
Noriyoshi: In terms of story, this is brand new stuff. Remember Joe Musashi? This is his successor.
Any classic levels revisited?

Takashi: Look closely and you will find something.
How many members are from 16-bit versions?
Takashi: Zero. Many are still at the company though.
What is your favorite Shinobi?
Takashi: Shadow Dancer but most like 2 the best.
Does the game have much story? Is it CG or real time?
Takashi: Both. We have a very long and deep story.
The last Shinobi, on Saturn was... different.
Takashi: [holding back laughter] Somebody else made that–we released it but did not develop.
Any new attacks in the game?
Noriyoshi: You accumulate energy in your sword by defeating weaker enemies building power to take on larger demons.
Is this a new beginning for Shinobi?
Takashi: You will decide.
Is it a long game?
Takashi: Very–also, most adventure games are 60/40 adventure to action. We are opposite–more action. You don't need a key to open the door; if you see a door, break it! We are action and true adventure.
Sounds like the new evolution of Shinobi.
Takashi: Yes, and you don't need to find a key. [we all laugh at that one]

Star Fox Adventures

CLASSIC RARE GAMEPLAY IN A FULL-FLEDGED UNIVERSE WITH BOUTS OF STAR FOX SHOOTING SEQUELS THAT I DO

Lock-on and let it rip! Fox McCloud can purchase a vast array of weaponry with which to dispense pain on the enemy.

Let me show you what we do to thieves...

Super Mario Sunshine

[illegible]

THE INSTANT YOU PICK UP THE GAME, YOU KNOW YOU'RE PLAYING SOMETHING BRILLIANT.

Shigeru Miyamoto on Super Mario Sunshine

"The game system is essentially based on Super Mario 64, and is [illegible] on of that. In terms of the actual gameplay and game [illegible] will be somewhat similar. But one of the big-[illegible] is that in 64 when you chose a specific area, there wasn't a whole lot going on; there was kind of the main focus of the level and that was it. In Super Mario Sunshine, we've got some very large areas with a lot of stuff going on in them all at once. You can stand in one end and look to the far side and see things going on over there.

And obviously we've a[illegible] to spray water or to h[illegible] transportation. With t[illegible] players can enjoy the immer[illegible] find their own ways of reaching diff[illegible] in the direction of rather than [illegible]

Simple textures and less than cutting edge geometry highlight that Mario games have never visually pushed the envelope, but is there a more appealing universe out there?

Toe Jam & Earl

[illegible]

Rumored to exist and now finally on display for all to see and own, the mission's first was correctly [illegible] very alive and extremely cool at this year's show. The *Toe Jam & Earl* title seems [illegible] to revive Sega's [illegible] and it's been a long, [illegible] and [illegible] since [illegible] with the launch of the first Sega Dreamcast console and some of the [illegible] to [illegible] the [illegible] Dreamcast [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Although it does look pretty busted, nothing can prepare you for the actual experience that All Funked Up so comedically delivers. It's fun, and it's funny, and I am like, really down with that, man.

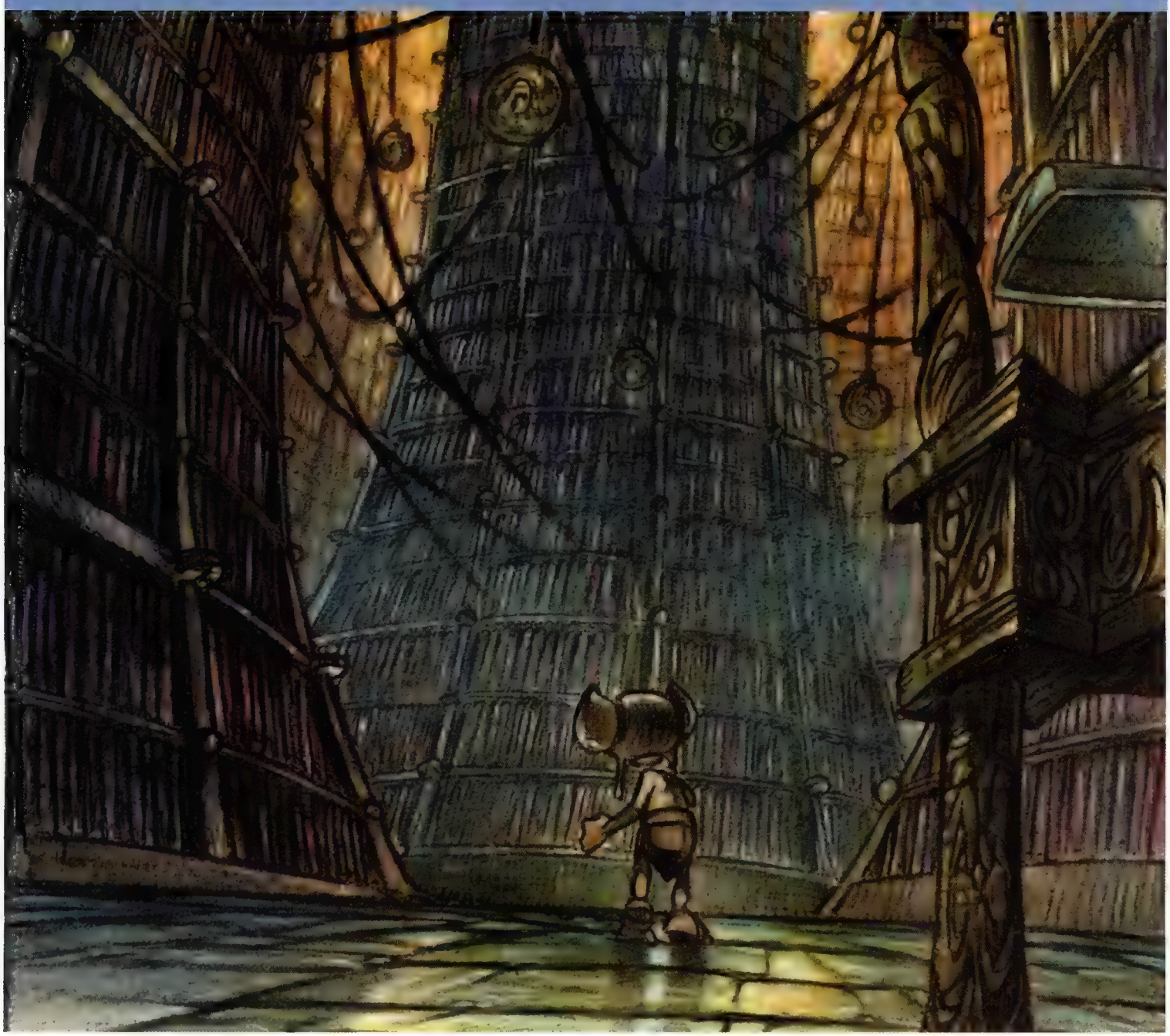
Tork

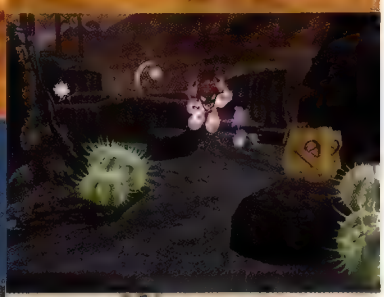
system: **xbox** / developer: **tiwak** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **2003**

Our behind the scenes meetings this year were limited but bountiful and trimmed with a very large X. My game of show lay behind a meeting room door adorning the cool prehistoric gaze of a runt named Tork, looking out from his massive horned headdress. Imagine my shock when I learned that the team responsible for Rayman 2 (sans Mr. Ancel) had splintered from the Ubi fold and formed their own company–TIWAK. And let me tell you, TIWAK has tools, lots and lots of magnificent tools. They are sculpting no less than the epitome of 3D platformers, sending their cool little cave dude on a romp through time where he'll swim in water that looks wet, interact with seamless creatures that bubble with life, and traverse landscapes that shift and change on the fly. The game blows me away right now [illegible] this come to life on this hardware makes my optifrokulon twitch. It's safe to assume that I'll find a way to squeeze a little Tork into each and every issue leading up to the little guy's debut, so stay tuned.

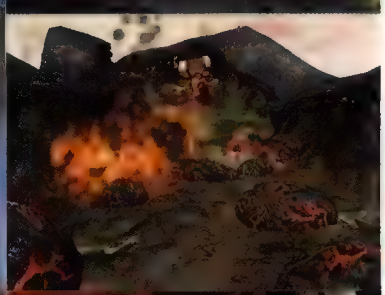
DAVE HALVERSON

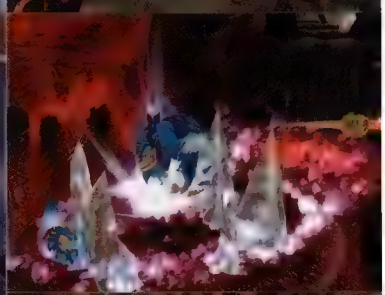
THE CREATORS OF RAYMAN 2 THE GREAT ESCAPE TURN THEIR CREATIVITY LOOSE ON XBOX WITH STUNNING RESULTS.





It's the new Bonk, only waaay better! Yippee! I'm so excited for this game I can smell the leather, the smoke, the prehistoric piles... Every aspect of the game is perfectly devised by a team who knows the genre like no other.





Wario World

THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE NINTENDO FAMILY PROVES HE'S BLACKER THEN EVER. THESE SHOTS DON'T BEGIN TO TELL THE STORY.

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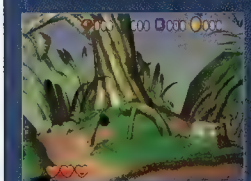

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The Legend of Zelda

What's not to love about the new Zelda? Oh right, it's not dark and intense. Isn't there room for something else?

"WE HAVE MANY DIFFERENT REASONS FOR WHY WE WENT WITH THIS CARTOON LOOK, BUT ONE OF THEM WAS THAT IT REALLY ALLOWED US TO SHOW A LOT OF EMOTION ON LINK'S FACE. THIS REALLY HELPED TO BRING OUT HIS CHARACTER."

-Shigeru Miyamoto, producer, The Legend of Zelda

Quantum Redshift

system: **xbox** / developer: **curly dog** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **august**

Microsoft's answer to the Sony futuristic racing staple, WipEout, hit with a sonic boom at E3. Quantum Redshift not only ups the graphics anty, with bump mapped environments that surpass any racing games visuals to date, but also raises the bar with its blistering sense of speed and truly special effects generated by the games bevy of weapons. Fast, furious, ultra smooth, and [illegible] AI, providing character nuances that should ad a cool action element to the overall experience. Each [illegible] speeds in excess of 650mph. That oughta blow your hair back DAVE HALVERSON

AS FAR AS FANTASY RACING GOES, QUANTUM REDSHIFT WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING

Looks that kill are met with a story and gameplay just as fierce

MechAssault

system: **xbox** / developer: **day one** / publisher: **microsoft** / available: **q3**

Throughout the history of gaming, developers have consistently tried to turn giant mechs loose in cities and make it look like something you'd actually want to play. To date, they have failed, but it's a new day, and the sky is bright green. MechAssault is, simply put, the best looking mech assault game that has ever been, and it plays like a dream. Heavy-metal crunching has come to town and it aims to obliterate everything in its path. The steely, refelective, shimmering mechs move with the violent grace of OCP's ED-209, the buildings break away and deteriorate realistically, and the attacking forces look and act like they would if, say, a 100-foot-tall robot came marching into town. Games like this helped Microsoft steel the show. DAVE HALVERSON

NO MATTER WHO YOU SPOKE WITH AT E3, MECHASSAULT CAME UP IN THE CONVERSATION. THE GAME IS SIMPLY A BLAST TO SEE AND PLAY.

The new king of mech battle games, everything in MechAssault reacts as it should.

The ultimate off-road driving adventure is heading to the Nintendo GameCube™ this summer! With five massive levels, a huge new arsenal of countermeasures and split-screen multiplayer action for up to four players, working for an elite band of smugglers has never been more exciting or dangerous. Make the drop, hit the nitro boost and get across the border before all hell breaks loose!

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Huge selection of off-road vehicles with reflection mapping and meticulous detail get you where you need to be.

FOUR PLAYER!

Daring missions including aerial drops and border chases take you through an immersive story line.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE™

www.rockstargames.com/smugglersrun

Angel STUDIOS

R

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Ratchet and Clank

system: **ps2** / developer: **insomniac**/ publisher: **scea**/ available: **november**

There's no denying Ratchet and Clank's awesome visual presence, but beyond the raw technical skill—the level of detail is striking—is a wonderfully appealing canvas of inviting colors, gorgeously imagined creatures and fantastically constructed worlds. Because the action is not contained in one universally themed area, instead moving across an array of alien planets, ships and cities, there is a freedom for the artists to invest an entirely distinct look and feel to each mission. From the beginning, Insomniac desired a game that would be uncommonly visually diverse. This variety also carries over to the gameplay. An emphasis is being placed on creating an experience that does not draw from one dominating idea, with several influences working together to create a much more engaging reality. There's a lot of action and platforming, a little RPG, big adventure and exploration, continual storytelling and cinematics and emotional pull. Travel takes you to chat with characters, make deals for upgrades and repairs, buy weapons and gadgets. You start out with a boomerang-like axe, and the incredibly unique grenades for offense, but quickly upgrade with all sorts of cool, effects-intensive weaponry. Ultimately, Insomniac believes Ratchet and Clank will offer you a virtual universe that feels organic and alive, not scripted and disjointed. BRADY FIECHTER

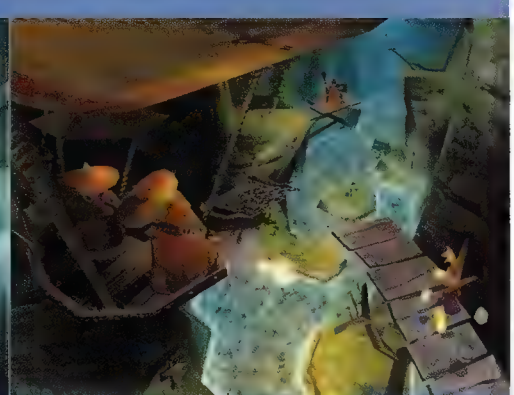
INSOMNIAC'S LATEST LOOKS TO FURTHER THE ROLE STARTED BY JAK AND DAXTER. BIG SHOES TO FILL.

The wealth of available weapons and gadgets is the catalyst of the gameplay

Rayman 3

The big thing about Rayman 3 is all this innovation going on, all the upgrades and gameplay complexities being thrown into what was already a fantastic formula. Rayman's digging deep into his darker self, finding a slightly removed tone from the series' distinctly rich playfulness. This one left a surprise impact, simply because there seems to be compelling reason to return to the rayman universe again. And it just looks so good, with an ambience that is all its own. BRADY FIECHTER

A NEW TEAM IS TAKING RAYMAN IN NEW DIRECTIONS, FROM THE FACES TO THE PLACES



One thing no Rayman game should ever be without... Globox!

Think you got what it takes to control her?
ENDGAME
Tons of different modes of play that will keep you coming back for more
Fully interactive and destructible environments— If you can shoot it, you can hit it.
Blast your way through over 20 locations around the world

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

PlayStation 2

Supports Light-Gun Peripherals

Guncon

GUNCON2

EMPIRE INTERACTIVE

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Resident Evil Zero

system: **gc/** developer: **capcom /** publisher: **capcom /** available: **q4**

Upon finally slapping players on the back of the head and politely telling them how sad it makes me that they can't see the true brilliance of the Resident Evil formula—and, yes, it is a very deliberate formula, which has yet to be replicated in other games—I took controller in hand to form my own views on this very Resident Evil Resident Evil. Conclusion: the games just keep on getting better, because everything that works so well is refined, added to, mixed up, and layered in the most detailed imagery on the E3 floor.

You either like it or you don't, and you pretty much know what to expect from Resident Evil 0: zombies, fires, puzzles, weapons, silly story, incredible mood. Everything looks even better than the GameCube remake of the original, strengthened by subtle details and awesome effects: the rain [illegible] presence to the otherwise static nature of the CG backdrops. BRADY FIECHTER

THE PLAYERS IN RESIDENT EVIL ZERO DON'T GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT, THEY GO BAM

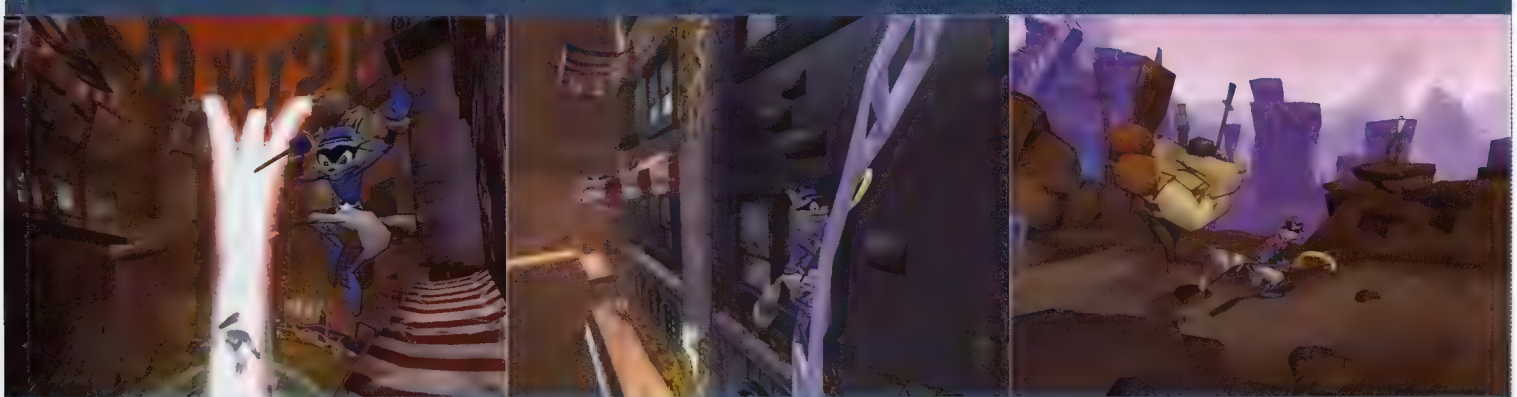
GameCube owners have something of their own to brag about-something very engaging and very, very beautiful.

Sly Cooper

system:ps2 / developer: **sucker punch/** publisher: **scea/** available: **september**

There was nothing quite as satisfying at this year's E3 as the look on peoples' faces as we handed them the June issue of **play** with Sly Cooper on the cover, as if they were thinking, "I should have known." I love all of our covers, but it was truly an honor to be the first to showcase Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus, a game that I know will bring a wide smile to the face of each and every gamer who experiences it. Sly is far and away Sony's best new game, and the PS2 franchise we've all been waiting for since Crash. Beyond what we saw and played for our cover story, a few members of Sucker Punch took us through the game's real-time opening act and the intro that follows, which further cements Sly as the next big thing out of the burgeoning Sony camp. The attention to detail being paid to Sly, like little shards of brick that fall away into the night as he scampers across a ledge, is the stuff that legends are made of—truly a game to be celebrated. DAVE HALVERSON

SUCKER PUNCH'S SECOND GAME IS THE PS2 FRANCHISE PLATFORM GAMERS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR.



Poetry in motion doesn't begin to tell the tale...

HE WAS UNDEFEATED.

HOW WILL YOU CARRY ON HIS LEGACY?

BRUCE LEE™
QUEST OF THE DRAGON

For the first time ever, you can fight as the one and only Bruce Lee. In Quest of the Dragon, motion capture technology authentically recreates more than one hundred of Bruce's Jeet Kune Do moves. Designed exclusively for Xbox, it's an action-packed fighting game where you'll battle hordes of thugs in an epic struggle for survival. Get ready for a fight of legendary proportion.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

XBOX

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RONIN

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Auto Modellista

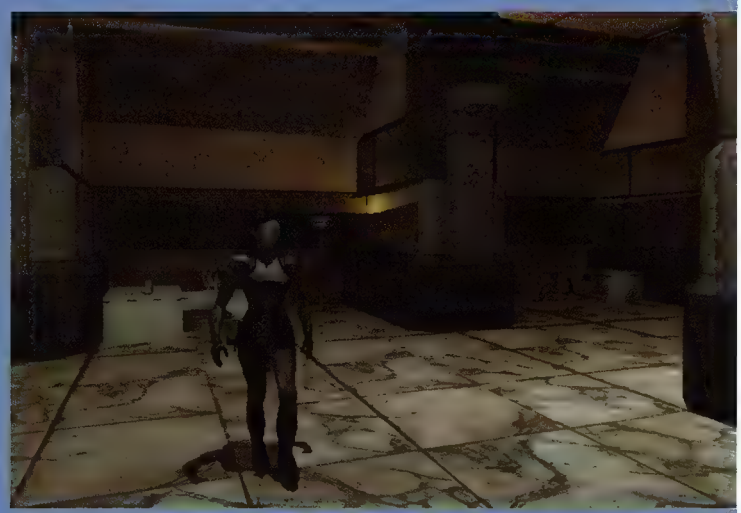
system: **ps2/** developer: **capcom/** publisher: **capcom/** available: **august**

Capcom's thrilling cel-shaded racer proved to be as fun as early screens and movies suggested. Shown primarily at E3 through linked systems (emulating the online play that will be a big part of this game's appeal), Auto Modellista was a fast, arcade biased blast. And there's no denying the impact of the visual style. There's nothing new about cel shading, but its application in a game of this type is truly unique. Especially cool were the anime-like hash marks imparting an awesome sense of speed as you rocketed down the straights in first person view. MICHAEL HOBBS

Deus Ex 2

system: **pc/** developer: **ion storm/** publisher: **eidos/** available: **tba**

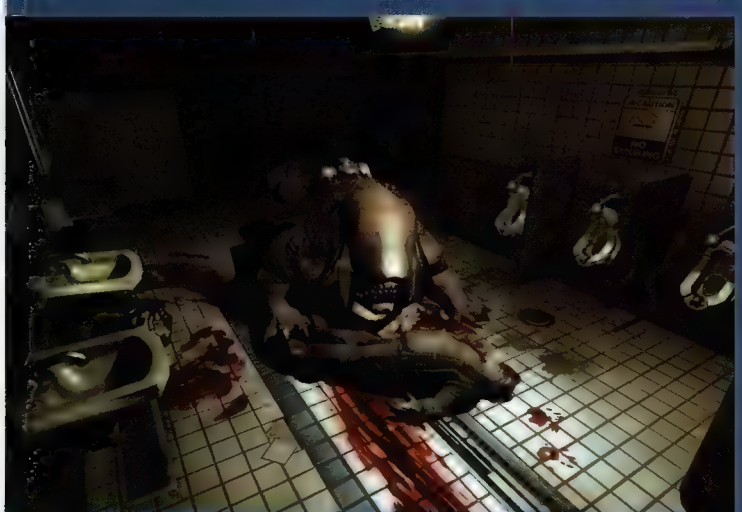
"Aside from John Carmak [with Doom 3], nobody's lighting their games like we are," boasts Warren Spector, creator of the highly anticipated sequel to the acclaimed PC first-person shooter Deus X. You've never seen anything like this before, the way the objects in the room throw shadows across tables, over walls and around boxes; when those mechs rumble into the room, their shadow casts an eerie presence within the environment. Ambitions continue with the gameplay, an uncommon union of the strong action we've come to expect in an engaging FPS and an open-ended gameplay path normally reserved for a role-playing inspired adventure. Like the original, an emphasis is being placed on granting you unrivaled access to the game's world, establishing points in the mission where you have multiple angles with which to carry out your goals. BRADY FIECHTER



Doom III

system: **pc /** developer: **id /** publisher: **activision /** available: **2003**

John Carmac has been pushing PCs to the edge for quite some time. When his baby Quake III made a splash, nearly everyone who owned a gaming machine had to upgrade one level up. With **Doom III**, expect the same. Imagine, as you strafe left and right, the smoke from your gun barrel flows with your movements, or after shooting yet another demon, he rolls down a flight of stairs, hitting each *individual* step—all that detail is here for your admiration. Add to that this nifty fact: Every single pixel is projected in real-time—every shadow, every character, every shattered air duct. Coupled with the eerie score of Trent Reznor, this is a slice of hell that shouldn't be overlooked. JON M GIBSON



Kung Fu Chaos

system: **xbox /** developer: **just add monsters /** publisher: **microsoft /** available: **q3**

Power Stone aficionados, fear not. Kung Fu Chaos, a quirky title from the folks at Just Add Monsters, is about to fill the gap. Similar to the renowned Capcom franchise, this fighter pits players into a slew of collapsing environments—there's just about four times as many as Power Stone 2, they're about four times as large, and four times more intricate. But the game also packs a humorous edge. Each playable character is a defunct Asian action star trying to regain their fame. So you'll be kicking your way through nearly two dozen rickety Far East movie sets—spoofed-out, of course, like *Jurassic Bart*—in hopes of achieving that marquee, starring role. JON M GIBSON

PlayStation.2

"Downforce is an essential racing purchase for speed freaks. It's a smashing drive."
- Play Magazine

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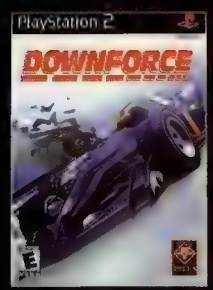

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Silent Hill 3

system: **xbox** / developer: **konami/** publisher: **konami/** available: **q4**

Silent Hill 3 flashed by on a towering video screen in the Konami booth, revealing more twisted visions of nightmarish creatures stalking humans who seem endlessly tormented. In a conversation with key team members, I praised their decision to retain the CG cutscenes that so effectively crawled under my skin in the past. They all smiled and laughed, thanking me for my mistake: everything is real-time.

Obviously the game has a long ways to go, but the team is very proud of what they've accomplished so far, and are working on breaking new ground with this expectedly creepy sequel. They assert that only they are capable of producing such wildly dark imagery, translating some of their very own nightmares, what frightens them in their daily lives, to the screen. They make a compelling argument: no game out there shocks like Silent Hill. BRADY FIECHTER

Suikoden III

system: **ps2/** developer: **konami/** publisher: **konami/** available: **q4**

You hear the recognizable, warmly infectious music and smile. You see the lovely character designs and rejoice. You admire the battle scenes and their classic sensibilities. A good deal about Suikoden III reminds you of what you love about the series. Here's to this sequel returning to the magic of the original. Unfortunately, the game was on such limited display at the show, leaving much to the speculation of very enthusiastic fans. The story begins 15 years after the conclusion of Suikoden II, with Chris, Geddoe, and Hugo along for the journey. Thing is, now you get to decide which are you prefer, playing through the eyes of your favorite hero. Response was positive. I for one, am looking forward to Suikoden III more than any other RPG this year.

BRADY FIECHTER

Steel Batallion

system: **xbox** / developer: **capcom** / publisher: **capcom** / available: **q4**

Finally the true nature of Capcom's Steel Batallion was revealed, and as expected, this game was indeed a mech lover's dream come true. The massive controller was on-hand, and though it was impossible to truly assimilate all its functions amid the hustle and bustle of the show, it did add a lot to the experience. Quite an empowered device this 41 button monster. As for the game, it was deeply complicated, but there were enough hints of action to make its fetishistic approach to mech combat more than worth the effort. In motion, the game looked like some pre-directed CG, not because of the graphics, which were very good, but because there were moments of combat that just seemed too cool to be real-time gameplay. But it was. MICHAEL HOBBS

The Getaway

system: **ps2** / developer: **team soho scee** / publisher: **scea** / available: **fall**

After finishing up the final mission on *GTA3*, take the action up a notch. The Getaway basically jerks everything in Rockstar's blockbuster into full-throttle. Over 18 miles of London's downtown district has been precisely modeled in the game—and we mean *precisely*. If you're familiar with the city, you'll be able to find your favorite McDonald's, that bagel shop down the alley and even the local cineplex—it's all there. Toss in some hardcore gangster action, a 90-page script, and a constant barrage of bullets and you've basically got an interactive Guy Ritchie flick. JON M GIBSON

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H02004

Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance

system: **gba/** developer: **kcet/** publisher: **konami/** available: **q3**

Playing the next Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance, two things are immediately evident; the Symphony of the Night team are the at the helm, and they've taken a page out of the Genesis version, Bloodlines, in designing the castles larger residents–clanking masses of multi-jointed sprites from yesteryear. The combination of which is truly glorious, as are the new spells and moves, a true mishmash of the very best the series has to offer. Playing an hour or so into the game it's safe to assume that Circle of the Moon, as great as it was, can't hold a candelabra to this stunning sequel.

DAVE HALVERSON

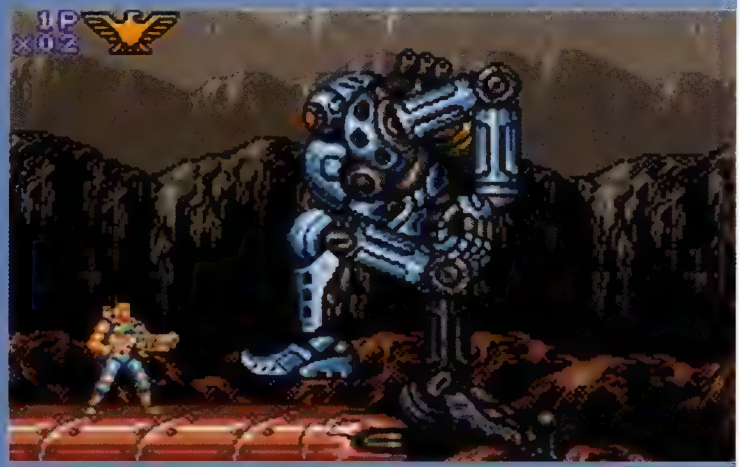
Contra

system: **gba /** developer: **kcet/** publisher: **konami/** available: **q3**

It's gotten to the point where we can pretty much count on a satisfying number of the 2D classics getting a rebirth on the Game Boy Advance (Castlevania collection, anyone?) The latest to boil your juices is Contra, which is very, very much like the Snes powerhouse, with a few new levels thrown in for additional surprises. What really matters here is that every shred of the action you beg for from a Contra game remains for the small screen.

Of course, any Contra without two-player support isn't Contra, so do look forward to linking up with a friend to share in the mayhem. A perfect handheld.

BRADY FIECHTER



Metroid Fusion

system: **gba /** developer: **nintendo /** publisher: **nintendo /** available: **august**

Perhaps you remain unconvinced about the merits of Metroid Prime. Though we may tell you its great, it's understandable that you could hate the idea still. So for you, Nintendo has cooked up Metroid Fusion, an original, side scrolling Metroid for the Game Boy Advance. I would have been happy with just a port of Super Metroid, but this game is all new, and I can't wait to play more of it.

The level on display at E3 showed a brighter, more varied color palette than we're used to seeing in Metroid games, and some new actions have been added to the character. You can now hang on to ledges, for instance, which makes the game feel a little more nimble, but also just a little bit less like Metroid. No matter, it's going to be great.

MICHAEL HOBBS

Yoshi's Island

system: **gba /** developer: **nintendo /** publisher: **nintendo /** available: **august**

The game that some would call the finest 2D platformer ever created is making its expected journey onto Game Boy Advance later this year. Nintendo's Yoshi's Island (the sequel of Super Mario World), combined the thrill of big, Super FX-chip-powered scaling and rotating sprites with some of the most innovative and addictive 2D gameplay ever seen. Shooting eggs to retrieve items or to open up parts of the level, Yoshi also had to keep little baby Mario from being snatched away from his back. And then there was the sheer brilliance of the level design and control, each meticulously crafted for maximum fun. The GBA keeps the dream of 2D alive. MICHAEL HOBBS

more best of show...

.hack
sys: ps2
dev: bandai
pub: bandai

Animal Crossing
sys: gc
dev: nintendo
pub: nintendo

Blade II
sys: ps2/xbox
dev: mucky foot
pub: activision

BloodRayne
sys: xbox/ps2/gc
dev: terminal reality
pub: majesco

Crimson Seas
sys: xbox
dev: koei
pub: koei

Colin McRae 3.0
sys: ps2
dev: codemasters
pub: codemasters

Crimson Skies
sys: xbox
dev: nintendo
pub: nintendo

Dark Cloud 2
sys: ps2
dev: soej
pub: scea

Devil May Cry 2
sys: ps2
dev: capcom
pub: capcom

DOA Volleyball
sys: xbox
dev: team ninja
pub: tecmo

Dr. Muto
sys: xbox
dev: midway
pub: midway

Dragon's Lair 3D
sys: ps2
dev: dragon stone
pub: encore

Dynasty Tactics
sys: ps2
dev: koei
pub: koei

Ferrari F355
sys: ps2
dev: am2
pub: sega

Godzilla
sys: gc
dev: pipeworks
pub: infogrames

Growlanser II & III
sys: ps2
dev: masna
pub: working des.

Guilty Gear X
sys: ps2
dev: arc systems
pub: Sammy

Hobbit
sys: gc
dev: inevitable ent.
pub: sierra

Indiana Jones
sys: xbox/ps2/pc
dev: lucas arts
pub: lucas arts

Jo Jo's
sys: ps2
dev: capcom
pub: capcom

Kingom Hearts
sys: ps2
dev: square
pub: square

Mario Party 4
sys: gc
dev: hudson
pub: nintendo

MGS 2 Substance
sys: ps2
dev: konmai
pub: konami

Mystic Heros
sys: gc
dev: koei
pub: koei

Phantom Crash
sys: xbox
dev: genki
pub: phantagram

Primal
sys: ps2
dev: scee
pub: scea

Robot A.D.
sys: xbox
dev: nintendo
pub: enix

Robotech
sys: xbox
dev: vicious cycle
pub: tdk

Sega GT 2002
sys: xbox
dev: sega
pub: sega

Spyro efd
sys: ps2
dev: equinox
pub: universal int

Tenchu III
sys: xbox
dev: nintendo
pub: activision

TimeSplitters 2
sys: xbox/ps2/gc
dev: free radical
pub: eidos

Turok
sys: xbox/ps2/gc
dev: acclaim austin
pub: acclaim

Wild Arms 3
sys: ps2
dev: scej
pub: scea

Xenosaga
sys: ps2
dev: namco
pub: namco

Z.O.E. 2
sys: ps2
dev: kcet
pub: konami

Personal View

Dave Halverson

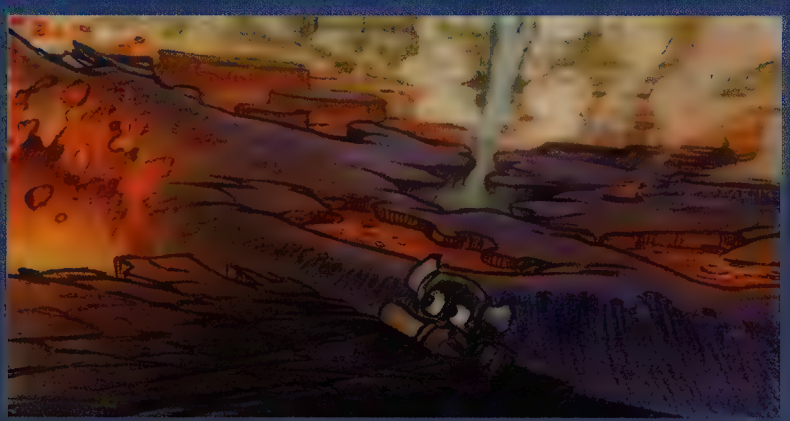
"Gaming, for the most part, has been given back to the people."

E32002 Top Ten

1. Tork/**xbox**/microsoft
2. Psychonauts/**xbox**/microsoft
3. Sly Cooper and The Thievius Raccoonus/**ps2**/sony
4. Shinobi/**ps2**/sega
5. The Legend of Zelda/**gc**/nintendo
6. Contra: Shattered Soldier/**ps2**/konami
7. Blinx the Time Sweeper/**xbox**/microsoft
8. Metroid Prime/**gc**/nintendo
9. Vexx/**ps2, xbox, gc**/acclaim
10. Gungrave/**ps2**/sega

In a recent interview, my life's sage David Bowie proclaimed, "On the whole, you know, the world is run by brutes for the common and the stupid, frankly." I'm reminded of this every time I switch on CNN, watch network TV, go out in public, or catch the bewildered stare of the man we elected President. I am, however, overjoyed that this sad fact no longer applies where the video-game industry is concerned. There was a time where corporate America was seeping in, threatening to stifle creativity and transform mainstream gaming into some vanilla extension of pop culture, much like the music industry has become today (but not for long). While the purveyors of that injustice prepare to pay for their sins with a toppling industry being taken back by the creative talents that spawned them, gaming, for the most part, has been given back to the people. Never have I witnessed so many visionaries with their wares on display. E3 was like a sidewalk art festival, bursting with new ideas, risky concepts, and the games of yesterday revisited, only draped in new technology. There's also an obvious shift in the way corporate deals with creative in this business. It's like they finally realized that crap, no matter how well it's marketed, won't sell. The best games at E3 had long lead times, suitable budgets and, most importantly, teams being given the freedom and tools to realize their vision. Of course, there still remain a slew of movie games and extreme sports franchises that are being harvested like crops, but those serve as the mulch from which the redwoods like Psychonauts and Blinx the Time Sweeper will soon grow. These are vital to the growth of the industry, but they're not going to take over as once feared.

Moving on, here's my take on E3 '02 in a nutshell (and I won't even do the Austin Powers bit). Both Sega and Microsoft blew me away. This was only Sega's second E3 as a software giant and they blew the roof off the place (and that's one very big roof). With Shinobi, Panzer Dragoon Orta, Toe Jam and Earl, All Funked Up, and Phantasy Star Online GC, Sega is showing their commitment to what got them here, and apparently, these mark only the beginning. They've found the combination to the vault and the legends have begun to spill out. Beyond '02, there are strong rumors of a new Golden Axe and Streets of Rage, but Sega is not content to



Honorable Mention

Mechassault/**xbox**/microsoft
Toe Jam and Earl/**xbox**/sega
Panzer Dragoon Orta/**xbox**/sega
Project BG&E/**ps2**/ubisoft
Star Fox Adventures/**gc**/rare
Super Mario Sunshine/**gc**/nintendo
Metroid Prime/**gc**/nintendo
Wario World/**gc**/nintendo
Malice/**ps2, xbox**/sega
Steel Batallion/**xbox**/capcom

stand still: they have a new crop of stars ready to start the roll anew, adding even more juice to their legacy. Might we see Alex Kidd, NiGHTS, and a new 2D Sonic in the future? It wouldn't surprise me. Hopefully Sonic's 3D days are over. Sega also rolled out the best sports lineup the world has ever seen, a raucous new action game with brass balls and an anime guise—Gungrave—and new versions of GT, House of the Dead, Ferrari F355, Monkey Ball, and Crazy Taxi. Speaking behind the scenes with Overworks, Sonic Team, and Smilebit, it's evident that Sega of America and Sega of Japan are working together like never before. SoA knows the power games come from Japan, and how to co-produce them to assure victory. What the 2K2 series, Gun Valkyrie, Sonic Adventure, Monkey Ball and Jet Set Radio Future started will continue to blossom in the years ahead. Hardcore gamers, RPG gamers, sports gamers, racing gamers…Sega has your back.

Moving over to Microsoft, through the mouth of the green tunnel, I found a mixture of pure gaming bliss and new innovation. From the guilty pleasures of MechAssault, Quantum Redshift, and Kung Fu Chaos, to the next level of air combat—Crimson Skies—and Shenmue II (now property of Microsoft), for only being in the game shy of two years, Microsoft is showing remarkable tenacity. No where was this more evident than in projects like Tork, the next big thing in platforming coming our way in '03; Blinx the Time Sweeper, pure platforming innovation from Artoon; and Psychonauts, an action game for intellectuals that may give rise to a whole new movement. Combined with Sega's support and the love they're getting from third parties, Microsoft is coming on fast—much faster than I anticipated. And at $199, the Xbox is the best deal in gaming.

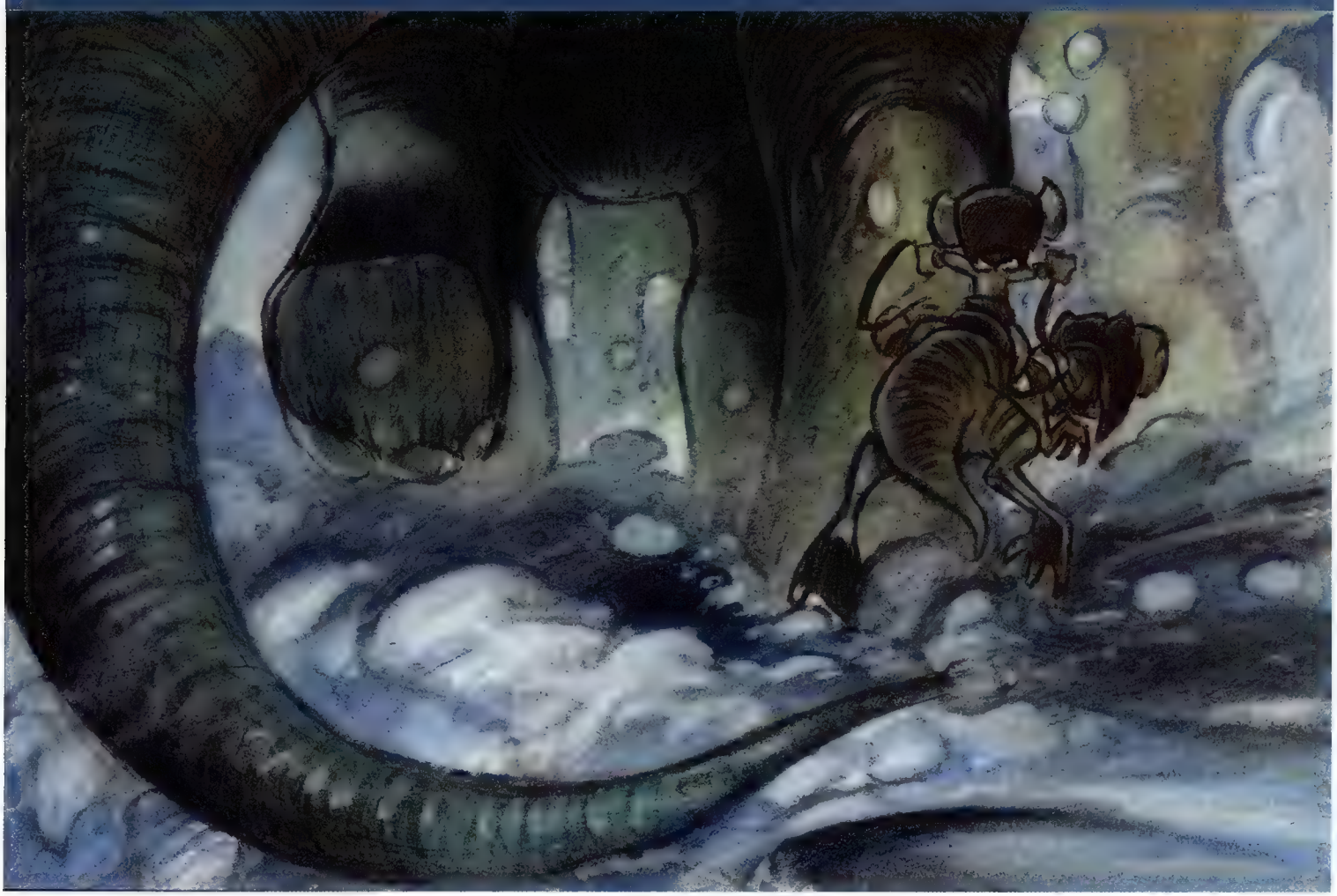
Back at the behemoth Sony structure, they are wearing their supremacy well. Innovation is in full swing with Getaway and Primal, new platformers abound led by Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus and Ratchet and Clank. They've redefined arcade action with The Mark of Kri, and third party exclusives like GTA: Vice City and Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, assure them an easy skate in the years ahead, with a big lead and lower prices across the board under their belt. Sony also has an online program (though this war has yet to begin) to rival Microsoft's, thanks to a fellow named Madden (who, by the way, has defined the physicality of gaming, dubbing it "optiffrokuton"—that being the nerve that runs from the brain through the arms and into the fingers, causing the twitch), ATV 2 and, of course, FF XI.

Moving over to Nintendo—and sardines live in palaces in comparison—there's no denying the '02 lineup is a powerhouse. The new look of Zelda takes a while to wrap your brain around, but once you Ocarina-detox, the magic behind it comes shining through. The Legend of Zelda stands as a truly spectacular new life for Link and company. Star Fox is pure Rare magic, and Metroid Prime, now thoroughly tweaked by Miyamoto, is truly great. Although I'm one of the few, I also think Wario World is fabulous, with Wario's defiant wit and unmistakably un-Nintendo-like etiquette, or lack thereof. Disney's Magical Mirror looks positively magical, and what's not to love about 1080, the only snowboarding ever worth playing. As for Super Mario Sunshine, my jury is out. I need quality time, sans people breathing down my neck to play Mario, though, I'm certain it will burn into brain like every other Mario game has. I'm unsure what the Cube will have left in its tank after this year, but right now, I really don't care, as it is going to be one of the most glorious years in the history of Nintendo games.

And, finally, there's all the third parties that support this mayhem and, although they are fewer in number and larger in size, the state of the industry is rock solid. Konami: Contra—old-school Japanese Contra, hallelujah!—as well as vintage Castlevania, ZOE 2, Silent Hill 3, Suikoden 3, and more Metal Gear. Capcom: Steel Battalion, an experience I can't believe America is getting is better than I ever dreamed, plus JoJo's, Resident Evil Zero, Onimusha 2, and (drum roll in head please followed by crunching guitar riff) Devil May Cry 2! Acclaim: Vexx and Turok, Ubi Soft: Rayman 3, and Project BG&E, Square: Kingdom Hearts, Activision: Blade II, Universal: Fellowship of the Ring, The Hobbit, and Spyro Return of the Dragon, Sierra: Malice, Midway: Dr. Muto, Eidos: Tomb Raider TAoD, Fear Effect Inferno, Timesplitters 2, and Deus Ex 2 (those shadows!) EA: Bond: Die Another Day, Namco: Xenosaga, Enix: Robot AD, Working Designs: Goemon, Infogrames: Superman, Bandai: dotHack, Majesco: BloodRayne, Bomberman Generations, TDK: Robotech, Titus: Robocop, Sammy: Guilty Gear X, Encore: Dragons Lair 3D…and on and on. The only question is how we'll find time to play them all, though I'm sure we'll manage; eating and sleeping are overrated anyway.

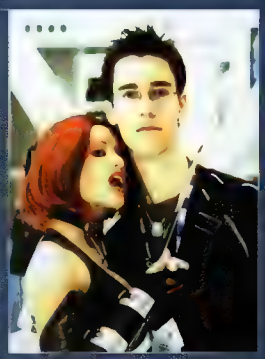
The thing about Tork…

It's very safe to assume that I will be the only person anywhere to pick Tork as game of the show, so here's my thinking: I live for character-driven platformers, and I have been dying for somebody to somehow take them to the next level, while adhering to what makes them so great in the first place. Maximo started that roll, and now Tork will finish it. This is a platformer on Xbox with real-time environmental events, new systems that will knock your moccasins off, and a new lead character I simply adore. He's my new Bonk! All this from the team behind Rayman The Great Escape—on Xbox. When Tork hits next year, and changes the world, remember where you heard it first.



Personal View

Jon M Gibson



"...there were so many games with a very distinct edge."

E32002 Top Ten

1. Psychonauts/**xbox**/microsoft
2. Doom III/**pc**/id
3. The Legend of Zelda/**gc**/nintendo
4. Toe Jam & Earl/**xbox**/sega
5. Contra: Shattered Soldier/**ps2**/konami
6. Panzer Dragoon Orta/**xbox**/sega
7. Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny/**ps2**/capcom
8. Dead to Rights/**xbox**/namco
9. Super Mario Sunshine/**gc**/nintendo
10. The Getaway/**ps2**/sony

No console launches—just pure, unadulterated gameplay. That's the closest I can get without inventing a slogan, because there is never a definitive definition for a convention like E3 2002. Realistically, trying to capsulate a three-day showcase for anything and everything pertaining to the gaming universe is pretty ludicrous. The software lineup was so vast; there were so many games with a very distinct edge.

Take the stream of innovative action-adventure romps heading to a console near you as a perfect example. Psychonauts, by the infinitely creative/sarcastic Tim Schafer (Grim Fandango, Full Throttle, Day of the Tentacle), is at the head of that furious stream. When you take the demented, yet adorably addictive, drawings of good ol' Tim Burton—those from his most wicked days, being that tasty book of poetry called *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*—and blend that with the incredibly goth, yet adorably addictive, sketches of Johnen Vasquez (the mind behind Invader Zim, as well as his even cooler creations: *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac, Squee and Filler Bunny*), an amazing gameplay setup is at your fingertips. Visually, it's stunning. And when it comes to tapping buttons, it gets even better. In the very rough scheme of things, it's what the unreleased Evil Twin sought to do—but never truly succeeded at. But the stamina of the Xbox allows the creative genesis of limitless dreamscapes to unravel...finally. These others break the mold, too: Tork, armed with his fierce rock-sling projectile, offers some cool platforming tricks; Blinx, with vacuum cleaner and goggles in check, packs an ultra-cool time-shifting gimmick, adding another dimension to play (even if the character design is a tad retarded); and in Rayman 3, everyone's favorite pair of floating hands is back—and with a few surprises.

But like any seemingly PG-rated gamer, after my weekly family gathering at Ponderosa, my violent urges are usually bubbling far beyond the reservoir tip. When I get back to the comfort of my couch, "crap" instantly turns to "shit," and "darn" briskly transforms into multiple uses for the word "f—k." Luckily, besides the extreme decibel level of the show floor, E3 '02 presented folks like myself with something even more detrimental (or therapeutic, as I like to think more often than not) than furry critters. Just admire the ultra-violence of Doom III, by far the most excruciatingly perfect first-person shooter ever created by man. And if Grand Theft Auto: Vice City had actually been playable at the show—not even a peek behind closed doors, to my dismay—it would probably have nabbed my "Best of Show" within moments of the PS2 logo flickering onscreen. Needless to say, I wait with baited breath for this next installment in the morally reprehensible franchise.

Yet, The Getaway, which is guided by the same crime-pumping themes as GTA, is morphing the entire idea of a video game into something bakery fresh. It's only a first effort, so it's still rough around the edges—but admire the craftsmanship, nonetheless. There are real actors behind each character in the game, recording dialogue from a 90-page script as they simultaneously do an advanced form of motion-capture (invented from scratch, using magnetism rather than those goofy Ping-Pong ball censors). Plus, to model over 20 miles of London—precisely, without compromise—just adds to The Getaway's gritty style.

As for innovations of a different wave: The Legend of Zelda, oozing with a primped, intoxicating form of cel-shading that should be accepted by all (it's a huge deviation, but maintains Link's classic sensibilities; give it a shot); Steel Battalion, showing us that a controller can be more than "start," "select" and a few other buttons, even if it will probably retail for more than the Xbox itself—and that's after the price drop; and even Dino Stalker, for braving the light-gun climate by adding mobility to the action (players can now zoom around the environment using the GunCon2's directional pad, adding to the challenge and excitement; if a dino tries to pounce, back up and shoot 'em in mid-air). Toe Jam and Earl 3 also makes me very happy, dripping with hilarious ghetto slang, hip-hip analogies and all-around goofiness that only a skinny-ass red "thang" and his pudgy buddy could pull off with perfection. It's rare to laugh out loud while playing a game; with TJ&E, I had to paste a few dozen Band-Aids on my busted gut.

And the return of "The Greats" was a celebration, to say the least. Panzer Dragoon Orta is absolutely stunning; Shinobi packs an enormous kick; Super Mario Sunshine delivers the action you've come to expect from the stubby Italian plumber, complete with a new "watery" gimmick; Contra: Shattered Soldier is "totally old-school," as I overheard numerous times on the show floor while staring at the action franchise—it's actually been graphically revamped while still managing to maintain a 2D edge; and Metroid Fusion, the GBA version, is truly the way Samus was meant to be played (with absolutely no FPS glamour installed).

There's so much more—like Dead to Rights, Onimusha 2, The Mark of Kri, Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, Red Dead Revolver, Unreal 2, Unreal Championship, Kingdom Hearts, Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee, War of the Monsters, Gungrave, Kung Fu Chaos, Tenchu 3, Sly Cooper, Crimson Skies, Auto Modellista, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs, Super Monkey Ball 2, Legend of Zelda (GBA), Neverwinter Nights, Resident Evil Online, the next, untitled installment in the Breath of Fire series, the next Phantasy Star Online—but there's only so much space for me to ramble.

Honorable Mention

Blinx: The Time Sweeper/**xbox**/microsoft
The Legend of Zelda/**gba**/nintendo
SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals/**ps2**/sony
Tenchu 3/**ps2**/activision
The Mark of Kri/**ps2**/sony
Shinobi/**ps2**/sega
Kung Fu Chaos/**xbox**/microsoft
Gungrave/**ps2**/sega
Dino Stalker/**ps2**/capcom
Super Monkey Ball 2/**gc**/sega

Personal View

Brady Fiechter

"Games are better than they've ever been."

E32002 Top Ten

1. Super Mario Sunshine/**gc**/nintendo
2. Panzer Dragoon Orta/**xbox**/sega
3. Project BG&E/**ps2**/ubisoft
4. Metroid Prime/**gc**/nintendo
5. Resident Evil Zero/**gc**/capcom
6. Shinobi/**ps2**/sega
7. The Legend of Zelda/**gc**/nintendo
8. Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus/**ps2**/sony
9. Contra: Shattered Soldier/**ps2**/konami
10. Ratchet and Clank/**ps2**/insomniac

E3 2002 was big, bold and loud. It was exhausting and overwhelming, a giant stage of excess, an awesome display of scantilation and ego and power. Widely disparate opinions, mostly packaged in passionate rants, flowed as heavy as the free alcohol that made the mandatorily stuffy parties seem more fun than they really were.

Games are going the way of hollywood. Games are going the way of big business. Games are going full-throttle mainstream. Does that piss you off? Don't let it. Whatever this industry has become and is quickly becoming, one reassuring point resonated at this year's show: games are better than they've ever been. Much better.

Once you sliced through the overgrowth of assembly line scrap, you discovered a rich frontier of incredible games—projects of invention, energy, care and great craft. And for all the familiarity of cute animals running through bright worlds, of slick agents carrying big guns and causing big explosions, of Tomb Raiders solving puzzles in exotic lands, the fact remains that we have never been presented with such a wealth of visual snap, crackle and pop.

Are you upset that Panzer Dragoon Orta plays a lot like Panzer Dragoon Zwei, now resembling an ethereal storybook in motion? Does it bother you that Shinobi feels wonderfully like the original series, contained in a crumbling Japan that grabs you with its imagery? Is it really so bad that Resident Evil 0 plays a lot like that last handful of Resident Evils yet has the visual integrity and atmosphere of the best hollywood has to offer? And you must be seething to know that Contra is so faithful to the feel and play of the 8- and 16-bit classics that, upon first impression, it's basically Contra: Legacy of War with modern, polygonal dressings. (To quote the director: "We just wanted to return to the basics.")

Look, I'm just as hopeful as the next guy for a growth of originality in this industry, but the most exciting thing about this year's E3 was seeing so much of what I've grown to love about games being taken to the next stage with the propulsion of new visual sophistication.

I don't see much dramatically new about Mario, Zelda, Metroid, Silent Hill III, Suikoden III, Medal of Honor: Frontline, BG and E, insert your favorite game here. But I do see more games than I can remember that I can't wait to play, because they offer entirely distinct, newly imagined worlds to exist in. And it doesn't hurt that they attend to the "basics" with a master's touch.

Games are becoming a platform for visual storytelling, and injecting clever, skillfully staged scenarios while populating the worlds with interesting creatures is yet another way to make the old seem excitingly new. If a game is well crafted, handling the basics with artistry and essential care, is there no value to traditional design wrapped in beautiful images and engagingly scripted events?

I choose my words carefully: Games were not "beautiful" a few years ago; not so today.

Embrace it or despise it, the qualities that drive film—storytelling, atmosphere, pacing, camera dynamics, stylistic flair—are forcefully moving into our games. I say bring it on. But drop the thin, vapid storytelling and I guarantee the naysayers will find the value in rich dialogue in their adventures; most gamemakers know the value of storytelling, they just don't yet know how to find depth and strength in the process.

Fortunately, a select few do. When Tim Shafer's wonderfully clever Psychonauts—one of the best games at the show—hits next year, I think you'll agree that there is indeed great value in dialogue and storytelling that exists within the images of the game—when, of course, it's handled with this sort of subversive intelligence.

Maybe this game and the many others that captured my attention will be nothing like I imagine them to be. Time will tell. Some of what impressed me the most played on video. A lot of the games were impossible to find more than a few minutes of distracted play time with. And yet I have no doubt that the best year ever is upon us. Here's a list—impossibly incomplete—of what I anticipate will be the riches harvest of a bountiful crop.

Honorable Mention

Star Fox Adventures/**gc**/rare
Rayman 3/**ps2**/ubi soft
007/**ps2**/ea
Tomb Raider/**ps2**/eidos
Deus X 2/**xbox**/eidos
Time Splitters 2/**xbox**/free radical
Silent Hill 3/**ps2**/konami
Suikoden III/**ps2**/konami
Devil May Cry 2/**ps2**/capcom
Psychonauts/**xbox**/double fine

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nGame

PREY FOR DEATH

The best top-down shooter since Loaded, based on a traditional pen and paper RPG, is a dark journey worth taking more than once

words dave halverson

One year ago the dead crossed over to the human realm, only to be sealed by those humans—now Hunters—who witnessed the event. Avenger, defender, judge, and martyr, those "imbued" will ride again, ride tonight. The smell of fresh meat has brought the tortured souls of Ashcroft Penitentiary back, and this time they'd like to stick around.

There's a lot to be said for the action-shooter. Through the years they've provided us with a steady diet of release, always pushing the envelope in terms of technology, adrenaline, and more often than not, gore. For the PlayStation, the definitive game was Loaded, in all of its groundbreaking 3D, blood-spurting, twisted glory; I'll never forget Mama, never. While the PS2 is still waiting for its initial dose of projectile mayhem, the Xbox is already dripping blood with Digital Mayhem's Hunter: The Reckoning.

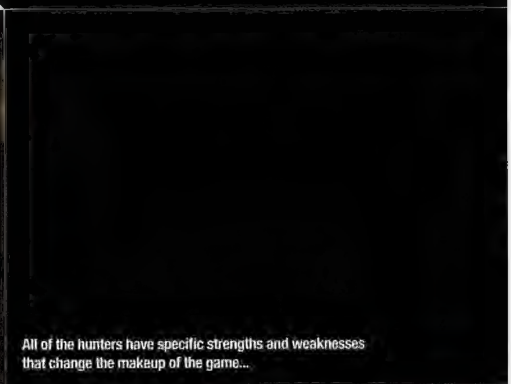
What separates the good from the bad in this category lies predominantly in three areas: graphics, gameplay nuances, and the details. Nail these and chances are gamers will stay glued, slaying wave after wave of anything you might send their way. Obviously privy to this information, Digital Mayhem dispenses a coffin-load of death and dismemberment, and then they really get going. Visually, HTR delivers like a pizza boy in a tuner car. The Hunters are seamless wonders, laden with articulate animation and seldom-seen detail, and the dark recesses of the gameplay, cold and antiseptic, are textured and lit as only the Xbox can deliver. The effects are so many, and so money, they creep by practically unnoticed and the details are painstakingly fleshed out. Switch weapons and your character's hands grasp them as if real, finger to trigger, palm to barrel. Choose your blade and they are reached for, grabbed, and twirled, as your Hunter stands at the ready as if to say, "Bring all that shit and just watch me go." Touches such as little puffs of dust underfoot, moths buzzing around street lights, animated fabric, breakable objects, and the semblance of rubbery undead flesh, help immerse us into the fray, and with action as frenetic and overwhelming as this, it's absolutely necessary. Like those big poly counts, huh? Well, here's Johnny. They materialize as massive waves of mutations only a mother could love, and zombies, lots and lots of lumbering, moaning, hungry zombies. Got brains?

Putting thumbs to analog, all is as it should be, the give and take between you and them tuned to perfection with an emphasis on positioning, timing, edge management (Hunter's special abilities, like healing, invincibility, super speed, etc.) and, once in a while, those great patterns.

Not to say that HTR is without flaws. The bosses, save for a couple, left me wanting, and up close a few of the models appeared a tad rushed. On the other hand, some looked quite fabulous, so I don't know what happened there. I also found the last few bits of gameplay—a sort of sporadic run-for-your-life dash—somewhat out of place, given the methodical nature of the levels I grew fond of throughout the game. In the grand scheme and scope of HTR, however, these serve as only minor quibbles given the overall breadth and beauty of this pure experience. My appreciation for some of the best undead character design and animation I have ever seen, and an overall air of doom I can really sink my teeth into, far outweigh a few hiccups. In these trying times, as cliché as it may sound, it feels extra good to let loose and just blow shit away, and Hunter: The Reckoning provides a superb platform for doing just that.

As you can see, the ghouls literally pour out; rushing in will always result in a quick death.

"CLASSIC SHOOTING AND CLOSE- PROXIMITY ACTION HAS NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD."



All of the hunters have specific strengths and weaknesses that change the makeup of the game...

XBOX

HUNTER: THE RECKONING

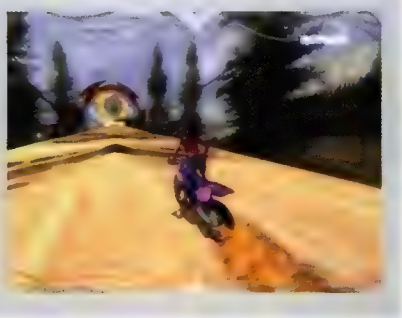
play rating

developer: **digital mayhem/high voltage**
publisher: **interplay**
available: **now**

Never take shit from anyone's stuffed animal

FREEKY DEEKY

The epitome of adrenaline-charged racing. EA goes BIG on Motocross



words dave halverson

When EA Sports went BIG on Snowboarding with SSX, I was as happy as a Catholic priest at an N'Sync concert, but when they decided to turn their focus to motocross, my sport of sports, I had mixed feelings. Would this mean no sequel to their physics-laden Supercross sim? Would I be denied the fulfillment of the '02 Stadium Season? It took all of about 30 seconds after kickstarting my PS2 to quickly nullify any skepticism.

Freekstyle isn't so much a motocross game, but an extreme racing game on motocross bikes—with a shot of adrenaline injected into every facet of its structure. The speeds are higher, the jumps bigger, and the tricks more insane. The tracks themselves—devilishly devised behemoths—are teeming with shortcuts, alternate routes, multiple layers, real-time obstacles, flaming rings of fire, and inhuman drops that send you hurling into an abyss, which, upon landing, would shatter bones and bike in the real world.

The gist of the gameplay is a medley of skill, timing and, of course, tricks, as you perform stunts, compounded by either combos, tweaks or both, to build boost and freek power. Once earned, boost provides, well, boost. Freek, however, is truly the juice of champions. Amass enough of this precious elixir, kick in the afterburners, and you'll be flying past that bat out of hell like it's standing still. The second half of the 14-venue circuit is all freestyle, so you can take your show on the road after winning and bust out sick air until the cows come home. Winning circuits lets you build your character's attributes, enhancing speed, jump, boost and landing skills, and gradually move onto better bikes useful in not only racing but unlocking special outfits, should you opt for mid-drift over cleavage, or whatever floats your boat.

As any MX race fan knows, even the best gameplay and graphics can be foiled by this genre's Achille's heel—poor rider animation, which makes it Freekstyle's most treasured asset. The riders in Freekstyle exhibit the most natural-looking movement ever witnessed in a game on two wheels, thanks to the specialist EA brought in to focus on just that, EA Big; EA also smart. Freekstyle is simply the epitome of adrenaline-charged racing—and a shining example of the PS2's awesome power.

"FREEK IS TRULY THE JUICE OF CHAMPIONS."

Check the awesome style and crazy detail, down to the knobbies

NINTENDO GAMECUBE | PS2

FREEKSTYLE

play rating ●●●●●

developer: **page 44**
publisher: **ea big**
available: **now**

With so much to do and unlock, great characters, killer music, and truly sick graphics, it's hard to find fault in freekstyle.

WHO ATE MICKEY?

Disney takes a turn for the better with Lilo and Stitch and deliver a PS2 game thankfully devoid of its soft underbelly

words dave halverson

Grappling, shooting, jumping, dodging, and climbing... the little guy does it all, and seems to really enjoy it!

Disney has wisely distributed their latest franchise over three major platforms, serving each a suitable dose of gaming magic based on their latest (and I say greatest) endeavor—the PG toon with attitude, Lilo and Stitch. The Game Boy Advance game covers the 2D realm in high style, the PS game delivers safe and sane family fun and, for the PS2, a little slice of prequel magic is just what the mad scientist ordered—Stitch Experiment 626. By ditching the cute lil Hawaiian Lilo, we're granted a game far less fruity, based on Stitch's escape from the space colony where he's been sentenced to be pulverized. He's a nasty, troubled little mutant, the product of an experiment gone awry, and that deviousness comes bubbling to the surface, making this game far and away the pick of the litter.

A somewhat manic amalgamation of blasting and platforming (with an emphasis on the latter), things begin innocently enough in the Greema Jungle, shooting, strafing, collecting DNA and climbing with Stitch's razor-sharp claws. World two's caverns and chasms introduce you to every man's worst nightmare, the Ball Slam (Stitch's butt bounce); and in Greema Falls, the game's final and best ingredient is introduced—the Grapple Gun. This blaster shoots a tether ray, allowing Stitch to swing from armature strewn vertically and horizontally throughout the levels, spiraling up massive towering spires and alien rock formations. This platforming-favorite play mechanic is used to great effect throughout the game. Basically every facet of 3D platforming is exhibited, from Frogger-esque river crossings to bounce pads and double jumps.

Visually, while not the most complex in terms of architecture, the levels in 626 are massive, cavernous and explode with color. Given Stitch's miniscule stature, they seem ominous in size and scope. The texture work is excellent, often giving off a simulated bump-mapping effect.

Interlaced with cut scenes from the film and supported by quality dialogue and music throughout, Stitch 626 continues the strain of quality Disney video games as Disney itself begins to exorcise its conservative demons and join the rest of us in the 22nd century.

"THE LEVELS IN 626 ARE CAVERNOUS AND EXPLODE WITH COLOR."

PS2

STITCH: EXPERIMENT 626

play rating

developer: **disney interactive**
publisher: **scea**
available: **now**

Cute and evil, like those old girlfriends...

MARK OF XCELLENCE

scea san diego's new action hero reawakens the arcade gamer in all of us by improving every facet of what makes action games tick

words dave halverson

Who among us is not attracted to the lure of the Barbarian—the powerful man who walks alone, ripped and foreboding, complacent yet fierce, both revered and feared. Visions of Arnold swirl in our heads, of ripping the leg from the bird, devouring it and then dragging our female by the hair off to bed where she will enjoy the privilege of pleasing her man. Not to take anything away from the out-of-shape, often frumpy king who flaunts his power and riches to get what he wants, but the Barbarian serves as much better lore. It's a wonder, then, that more games aren't dedicated to his memory—or at least good ones. Sony's San Diego Studios, the team that brought us the underrated Blasto, have set their sites on not only bringing home the Barbarian, but on reinventing arcade-style gameplay in the process, and have gladly succeeded on both counts. It takes a while to uncover The Mark of Kri's true spirit, but once unleashed, there's no denying that the game stands as a new action-fighting benchmark.

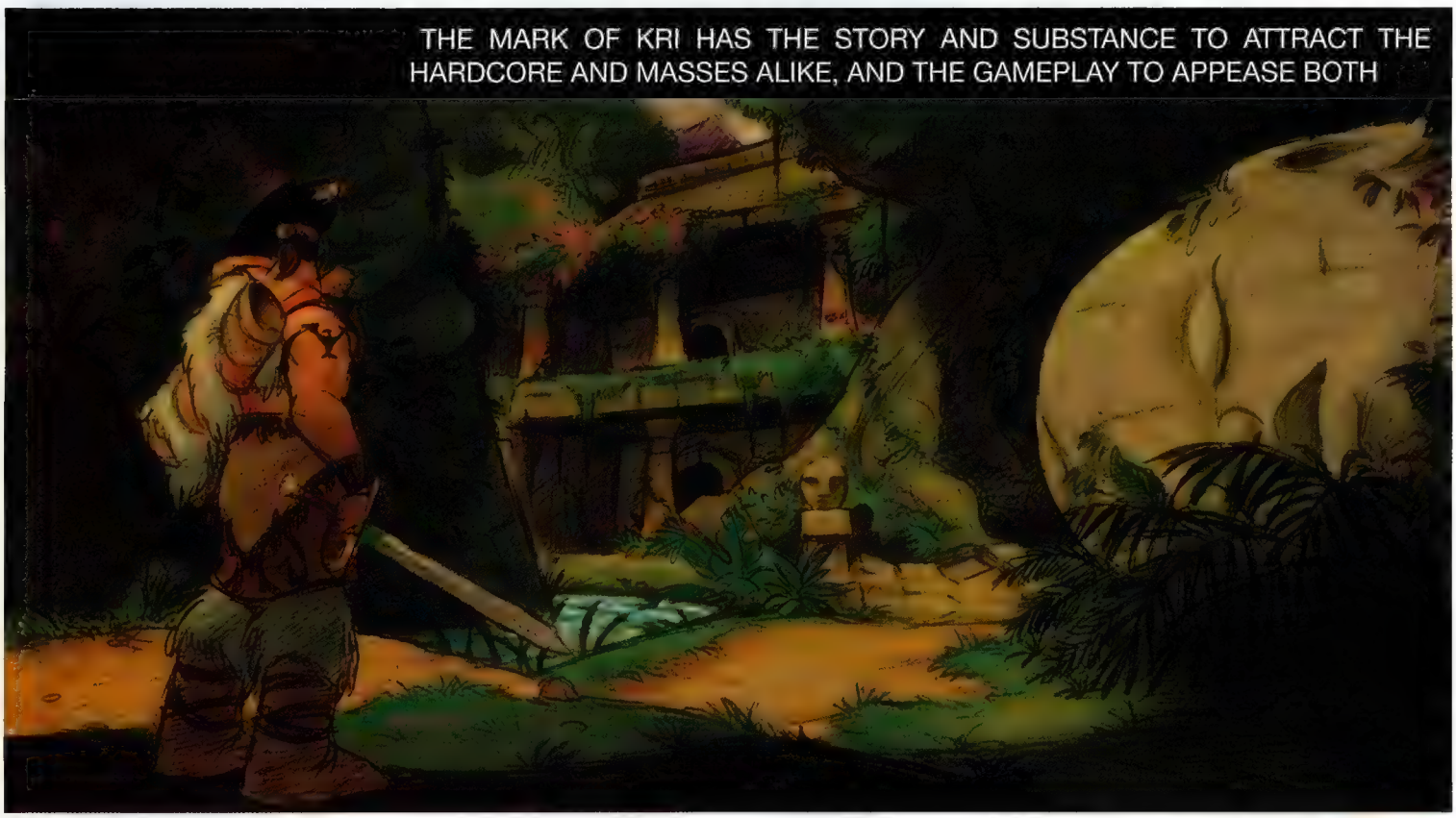
In a story spun of oracles, magi, necromancers, fierce warriors and six scrolls of marked human skin, our hero Rau sets out on a journey of destiny to uncover the dark secret behind the Mark of Kri and the evil that would use it to enslave the land.

Not so much the death ballet described herein last month by our own Mr. Gibson (I wish he'd share whatever he was on, though), Kri's gameplay revolves around two innovative concepts, as well as a few tried-and-true staples, sewn together nicely by exquisite real-time storytelling. Breaking away from traditional combat schemes, Rau uses a Lock Beam that emits a ray three or so yards out from his body in all directions. Sweeping over the enemies within range, once touched each is assigned a button up to three, representing x, square and circle, which allows Rau true 360-degree range of motion as he blocks and attacks in synch with each command. This also paves the way for some splendid animation routines, as armor flies and swords swing until

his attackers are downed, which usually culminates in some sort of extreme bludgeoning. Rau's tame and withdrawn until provoked, which summons a burning brutality so powerful it comes screaming and shaking through the control pad. Not one to dispense with the small talk, Rau pretty much kills anything that moves, when he's not at the inn that serves as the game's eventful and character-charged central hub. The Lock Beam is also used for stealth. Sheath Rau's weapon and he can sneak up on unsuspecting prey and execute a brutal silent combo, dragging one victim back silently and snapping his neck, while the other unknowingly awaits his date with death. In the likely circumstance an enemy is casting his gaze Rau's way, Kuzo comes into play. Sending his winged spirit guide out to distant perches and looking through its eyes, Rau can devise his strategy. An arrow fired at a distant gong will turn an enemy's attention long enough for Rau to relieve him of his head. And so it goes, growing deeper and deeper until you're managing ten enemy placements, sneaking around exotic jungles and temples, snapping necks, skewering heads and performing your decap-attack.

San Diego Studios has constructed each level to make the most of these nuances and surrounded the action with open, lush, cartoon-inspired environments. The game has a clean, simplistic look about it and an air of solitude that really helps paint the picture. The bouts of story that weave together Rau's journey are brilliantly narrated and the real-time line art on parchment animation that adorns each quest is truly something special.

The areas I have issues with—Rau being tethered to the ground with no jump, and the music, which seldom brings enough drama to the action—equate to a drop in the pail, set against such an obviously beloved project. As great a job I felt they did with Blasto, I think this team has finally created the brand they so deserve. The Mark of Kri has the story and substance to attract the hardcore and masses alike, and the gameplay to appease both—the mark of a truly great game. Together, Sly Cooper and Kri stand as my two front runners among the must-have Sony offerings of 2002.



PS2

THE MARK OF KRI

developer: **scea san diego**
publisher: **scea**
available: **july**

play rating

The deeper you go, the better it gets, until you feel like you're the one holding the sword

moto gp

play rating

developer: **climax sports** / publisher: **thq** / availalble: **now**

Not quite the attention to detail and intuitive controls of a Namco game, but a formidable, beautiful-looking GP game that Xbox race fans will surely be pleased with.

totaled

play rating

developer: **rage**/ publisher: **majesco** / availalble: **now**

A great technology demo for the box, and the best demo derby game around. Of course, that's is like saying, "'N Synch's best album ever!" Sure is perty, though.

legion

play rating

developer: **7 studios** / publisher: **midway** / availalble: **now**

Not a whole lot went right here, other than the cinemas, which are gorgeous. While it's not as deep, Baldurs Gate: Dark Alliance owns this category. Legion is quite a disappointment.

wwe x8

play rating

developer: **yuke's** / publisher: **thq** / availalble: **now**

All of the spectacle and dime-store pageantry of the WWE, without the ringside banter and soap-opera plotlines. Incredible creation mode, first-rate visual presentation, and nicely balanced.

space race

play rating

developer: **melbourne house** / publisher: **infogrames** / availalble: **now**

Not quite as impactful on PS2 as it was on Dreamcast, but still a super-cool cartoon racer packed with classic WB gags and giggles.

test drive

play rating

developer: **pitbull syndicate** / publisher: **atari** / availalble: **now**

Urban beats, muscle cars, and pocket rockets. All we need is Vin Diesel and some tuner babes and we're hot to go! Awesome story mode, beautiful graphics, and Pong–what's not to like?

britney's dance beat

play rating

developer: **metro** / publisher: **thq** / availalble: **now**

Ooh baby, baby, does this game get old in a hurry, with only five songs. But there's a feast of extras for Britney fans, it's easy on the eyes, and fun while it lasts.

stuntman

play rating

developer: **reflections** / publisher: **infogrames** / availalble: **august**

This is a seriously cool yet frustrating game–and I now hate directors. If you like the concept, you'll love this game; get ready for some serious do-overs, though.

c12: final resistance

play rating

developer: **scee** / publisher: **scea** / availalble: **now**

If you're still up for a spin on the old PS, don't miss Cambridge Studio's (Medievil) latest, a cyborg action-adventure bursting with great gameplay. I can't believe there's still gas in the PS's tank!

splashdown

play rating

developer: **rainbow studios** / publisher: **infogrames** / availalble: **now**

Rainbow Studios wet and wild racer looks stunning on Xbox, and plays better than ever, thanks to some minor tweaks.

legends of wrestling

play rating

developer: **slc** / publisher: **acclaim** / availalble: **august**

After playing X8, legends looks pathetic. This is just not good. The entrances are flat, the creation mode poor and the models lackluster. This brawler's DOA.

sky gunner

play rating

system: **ps2** / developer: **pixel arts. scej** / publisher: **atlus** / availalble: **now**

Sky Gunner isn't much fun the first time you play it. An odd camera which focuses on the enemies seems a rotten idea, then you get used to it, and discover a fairly deep and great looking shooter.

play anime

084 berserk
086 geobreeders
088 excel saga
090 betterman
092 series watch
094 hellsing

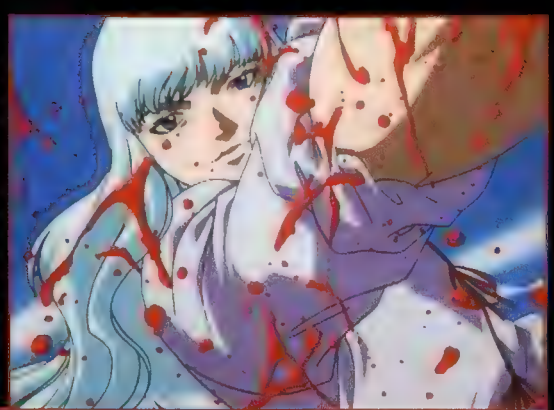
BLOOD AND GUTS

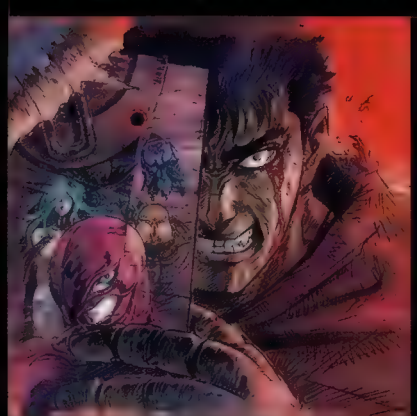
Berserk finally receives stateside, oozing everything that makes a great warrior epic

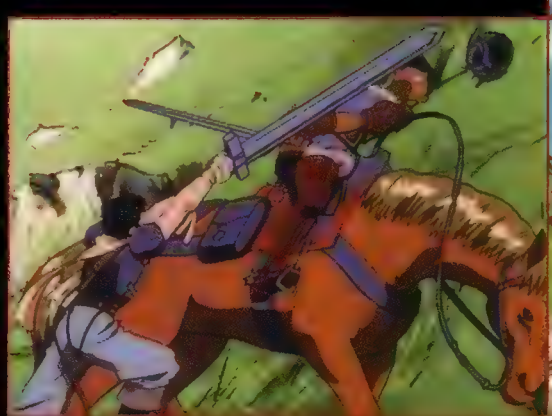
words dave halverson

After falling in love with his adventure on the Dreamcast, I've finally been initiated into the anime universe surrounding Guts, the mighty silent warrior with the giant sword, and I am dually intrigued. After the first episode's glimpse of Gut's tortured existence in the present, we flash back to his younger days and begin to chronicle a life forged of sorrow, war, and the pain that it brings. Sparingly animated yet totally intriguing, *Berserk: War Cry* would be hard to watch if not for its exceptional story and glimpses of harsh brutality that are so profound, I'm thirsting for someone to make a movie out of this warrior's tale in line with epics like *Gladiator* and *Excalibur*.

Guts is sought by a band of mercenaries and their charismatic leader, Griffith, after witnessing Gut's awesome power and fearless fighting style. His army, the Band of the Hawk, known as "Death on the Battlefield," serve the Midlands in their war against Juda. Griffith has aspirations of becoming a king, and a warrior such as Guts would surely bring him closer to his goal. To win Gut's trust, however, is not easy: he practically has to kill him just to be granted the chance. In between, the stern but beautiful Caska keeps a close eye on her new equal while Corkus, the Judas of the band, looks to kill him to regain the authority he never really had. By the end of volume one, Guts and Griffith are inseparable, but there exists many rifts around them. Griffith and his army have taken a giant step towards their goal, but the road ahead seems paved with blood, betrayal, and unspeakable evil. It is most definitely on.







BERSERK

studio: **media blasters** rating: **16 & up** running time: **90 mins**

extras: Art Gallery, Production Sketches, Trailers and Outtakes

play score

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NICE KITTY

When Phantom Cats decide the world is their litter box, Kagura Total Security cough up a hair ball

words dave halverson

It's a bright, sunny day in Ayagane City as the members of the Kagura Total Security Company—made up four babes, a cat woman, and a lone geek-boy—settle in for lunch in their shiny new high-rise office, unaware that atop a nearby building, a sniper is taking aim. As the bullet flies (triggering some nifty CG), grazing the Crimson Shooting Star's hat (she'd be the gangster of the bunch), everyone hits the deck. The bullet misses them, but the gas pipe in the wall hasn't done so well. About now the chain smoker of the bunch—driver Maki (a totally and grossly nicotine-dependant girl with huge boobs)—walks in, looking for a light, and you can guess the rest. This scene and every scene after that involve Kagura Security, and are constant reminders that they are all idiots, surrounded by a direly serious situation. The Phantom Cats, supernatural Cat people with the ability to travel through data streams and interrupt various services, have committed mass murder, taken over a government building, and set a plan in motion to annihilate Japan, leaving it for the kitties. So on the one hand you've got a sort of Die Hard/Bond thing going—as the army and creepy health and welfare minister deal with the tragedy—and on the other, a group of nut-balls stumbling through the background, inadvertently succeeding by simultaneously bungling every aspect of normal behavior.

Geobreeders 2 is one of those stories where separate threads move independently on a collision course to one big cataclysmic end. It's evil, comedy, a little love jones, and a fair amount of skin, all wrapped up in one great-looking package. To our benefit, pretty much every piece of the pie tastes great, and while it seems overly jumbled and complex as you take it in, by the end everything falls into place. With animation, character designs, and situations all worth multiple viewings (plus all five episodes on one DVD), *Geobreeders 2* is one to own.

"IT'S EVIL, COMEDY, A LITTLE LOVE JONES, AND A FAIR AMOUNT OF SKIN"

GEOBREEDERS

studio: **us manga corps** rating: **15 & up** running time: **120 mins**

extras: na/vhs reviewed

play score

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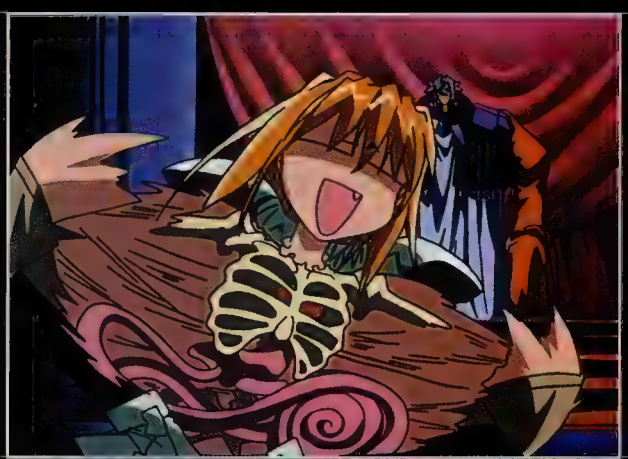
WEIRD DEFINED

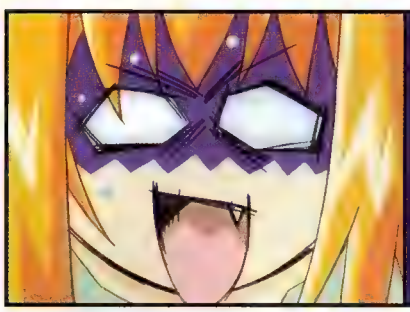
ADV's Excel Saga starts weird and gets weirder. It's the most fun you can have glued to your TV.

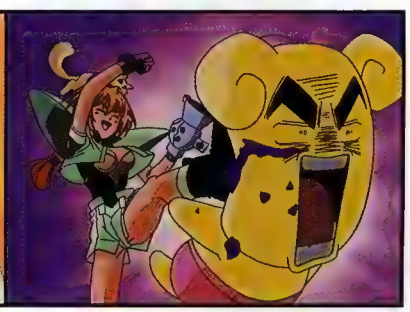
words dave halverson



"THE FIRST RULE OF EXCEL SAGA IS THAT YOU HAVE TO TELL EVERYBODY ABOUT EXCEL SAGA"

The first rule of *Excel Saga* is that you have to tell everybody you know about *Excel Saga*. Because regardless of who or where you are in the grand scheme of life, if you have the slightest inkling of a sense of humor and a propensity towards animation, this show–about an omnipotent being and the minions he sends to conquer the world, one city at a time–is little slice of heaven that you can't afford to miss. Besides sending up zombies, *Star Wars*, *Fight Club*, and countless anime (Galaxy Express really gets it), Excel is just pathetically funny. Excel herself is a total freakazoid, often speaking so fast and nonsensically that you can't understand a word she's saying. Whether she's slaughtering innocent citizens (poor Pedro!) or comic-book artists ("all users of ink must die!"), she is so utterly whack that you don't know whether to laugh or run. Not to worry, though: if she messes up, "the Great Will of the Macrocosm," a piece of space with shapely female arms and legs, will simply reset time, or bed-down a mortal; oh yeah, we're talkin' Fruit Loops here. Things get even crazier when Hiatt shows up, an anemic space queen (oh, and is there a story here) that comes to serve the same Lord as Excel, Ilpalazzo, only she frequently passes out without warning. And then there's Nabeshin, the token "Shaft with an afro" guy—the Space Butler (you gotta love him) and an alien race of super cute, ugly...things. And this is only volume one.





EXCEL SAGA

studio: adv films rating: 16 & up running time: 125 mins

extras: ADVid notes, clean opening and close, Japanese opening and close, original Japanese piracy warning, original Japanese trailer, production sketches, ADV previews

play score

WELCOME TO THE APOCALYPSE

"EVANGELION FANS REJOICE! THE WAIT IS OVER!" - *Wizard Magazine*

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

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"THE ANIME EVENT OF A LIFETIME" - *Play Magazine*

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Log onto sputnik7.com the week of July 20th for a sneak-peak at DEATH & REBIRTH

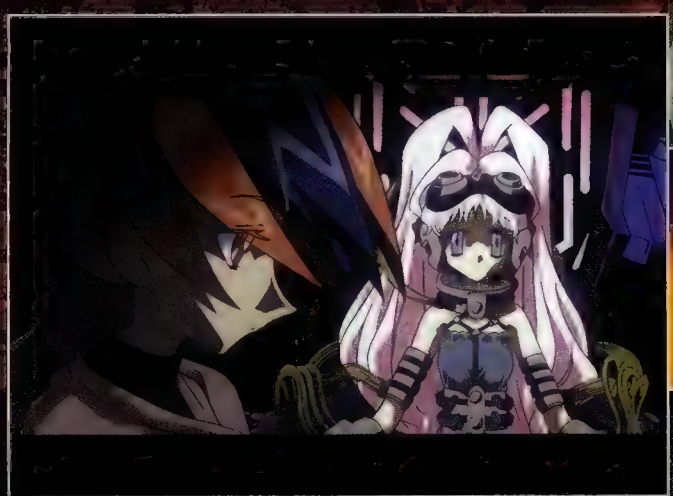
JUST BETTER

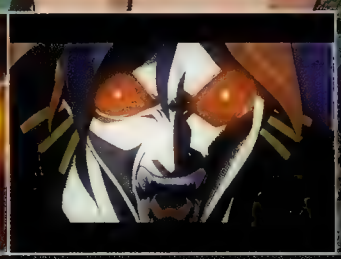
Bandai's new series has it all

words dave halverson

I think you've had enough giant robo anime, huh? Well, hold the phone, because I think Bandai may have something interesting in store. *Better Man*. Like a mish mash of *Evangelion*, *Gamera*, *Bubblegum Crisis*, and *Patlabor*, *Better Man* revolves around a special mobile unit, Akamatsu Industries, created to identify and stop Algernon, "the greatest threat mankind has ever faced" —an opposing force bent on, of course, death and destruction. Like all anime robots, only a certain breed of human can operate them, in this case called Dual Kinds—teenagers whose brain impulses can sync together to power the Linker Gel that Neuronoids run on. The impulses generate motive energy, which the Neuronoids amplify by tens of thousands by converting atmosphere to energy. (God I love writing this stuff!) Akamatsu's star Neoronoid is called Kakuseijin No. 1, a bulbous mech operated by an unlikely pairing of teenagers who are reunited in high school after spending their childhood together. Keita's the scooter-riding, PDA-loving, geek-turned-super-mech-pilot (and star of the show), and Hinoki is the too-pretty-for-him girl he could never get. She's also the pilot of the Kakuseijin. Keita stumbles onto the scene of a mass murder at an underground amusement park when he crashes his scooter and ends up in the drivers seat of the Kakusaijen looking directly up the bum of the lovely Hinoki. Convenient? Maybe. Entertaining? You betcha! Of course, it's all run out of a mobile unit operated by a gruff loyal and lovable father figure with intelligence, coming from a dainty, soft-spoken, pink-haired beauty tethered to a cybernetic thrown via tangled wireworks. That's new.

As strong as Kakaseijin is, Algernon is a relentless enemy force, like Angels, only funnier. When Akamatsu find themselves out-maneuvered, Better Man comes to the rescue. A slender human with a steely long main, he transforms into altered states by consuming the Nebula Seed, which transforms him into a massive Eva-like dragon called the Lamia. Everyone knows this is the only way to defeat a giant Chika Chan! By now you've either torn this page and flushed it or are totally intrigued. Me? I love this stuff. The freakier the better!





"KEITA'S A SCOOTER-RIDING, PDA-LOVING GEEK-TURNED-SUPER-MECH PILOT."

BETTERMAN

studio: bandai ent rating: 13 & up running time: 125 mins

extras: Reversible cover, textless opening, production art gallery, Mode Warp file #1, original letterbox presentation

play score

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series_watch

:: edited by **play** editorial staff

samurai girl realbout high school

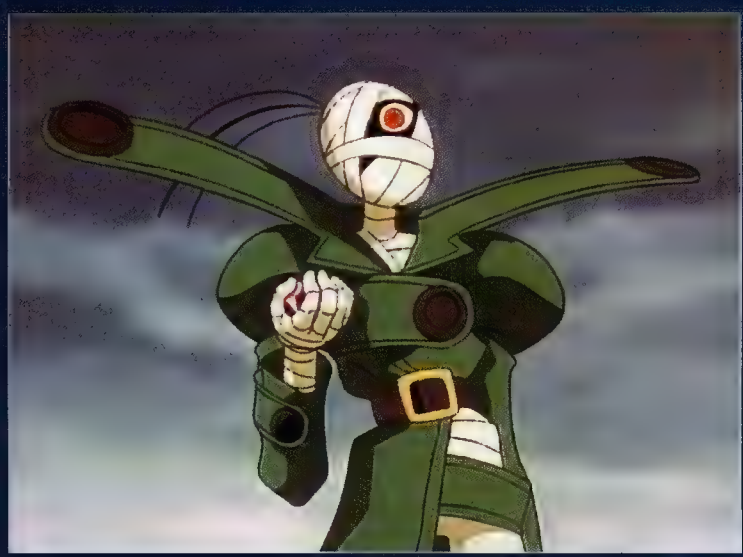
studio: **tokyo pop**
rating: **not rated**
running time: **75 minutes**

Ryoko and company take their show on the road in volume two of *Samurai Girl Real Bout High School: Netherworld Battle*. Destination 1 is the mall, where three otherworldly types catch up with Shizuma, and end up with a little Ryoko on the side, followed closely by her clingy cronies, the school photographer and her personal (like it or not) stenographer. Luckily she arrives just in time to give Nagi a hand, following her command performance as the Magical Waitress Oyster Lulu. Weirder, wackier, and a whole lot crabbier than volume one (yes, it's possible), things quickly escalate, graduating from one supernatural encounter to another as realms mysteriously continue to collide. The three attackers put up a decent fight, but prove the least of their problems, as we soon meet the root of all evil, a group of priests (and I'm not even going there) with a propensity for seafood that attacks. Quickly switching gears, whatever their intentions are, they'll have to wait, because back at school the next K-Fight, a rematch between Ryoko and her arch rival Kiribayashi Senpai, is about to begin, and this is no ordinary fight. Instead of laying the smack down, they're laying the snacks down in a cook-off that would make the Iron Chef hang up his apron…and that's before the Secret Flower Arrangement Club shows up. It's a good one.

power stone

studio: **adv films**
rating: **12 & up**
running time: **125 minutes**

Power Stone comes to a predictable close with the same slow, methodical storytelling that's helped make it one of the most lackluster game-based anime ever. After 19 episodes of searching, Falcon's reunion with his father, Pride, is completely anticlimactic, and the big revelation? Get all seven stones together and something cool will happen. Uh, thanks chief, we'd have never guessed that part. Actually, Pride wants to use the stones for good, while the opposition wants them to rule the world; now there's a shocker. Fact is, at this point it doesn't seem to make a difference, as the world portrayed in *Power Stone* seems to only have two mildly bad guys in it, and not a whole lot of problems otherwise. There is a semi-twist involving Falcon's hero Valgas, who turns out to be more than meets the eye (although that ain't much), and a parody of the *Poseidon Adventure*, which I can't figure out for the life of me—but overall, no revelations here, like Falcon grabbing the stones and using them to make Rouge his sex slave (I know, I missed my calling). The capper for me was Apolis' transformation once he got a hold of a Power Stone. It's so all about the Lance of Courage! Although Power Stone fairs better than Orphen, which they just stopped animating altogether, neither do the games they're based on (or vice versa) justice. On the bright side, however, *Wild Arms* and *Zone of the Enders* both look extremely promising.



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words dave halverson

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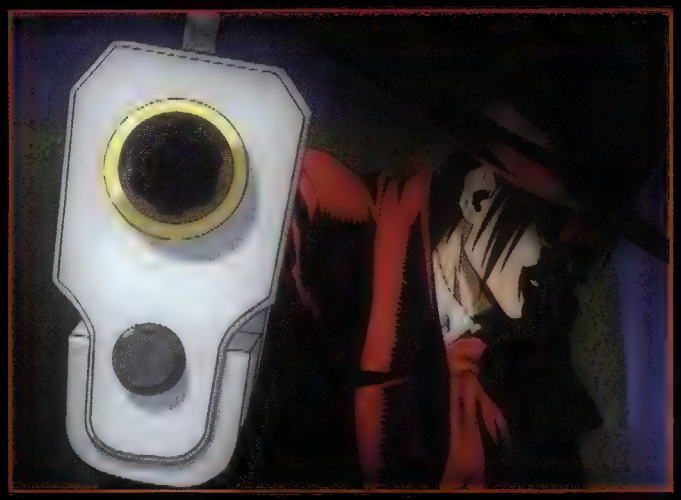
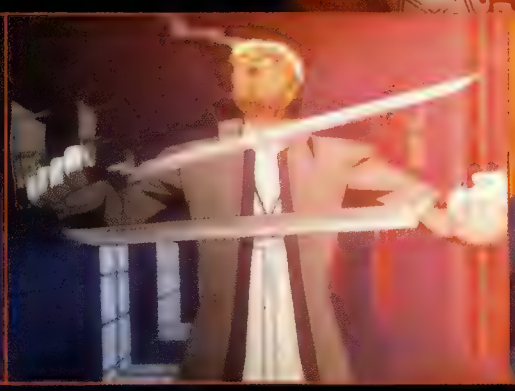
Anime Works



Highly stylized in the vein of BeBop, only with a decidedly darker edge, Hellsing has come to America dripping with vampiric goodness the likes that Western cinema seldom, if ever, delivers. The notion is that vampires live and walk among us and have a tendency to go on murderous rampages. When they do, the Hellsing organization, operated by the mysterious yet bold Integra Hellsing, is called to action with their unstoppable secret weapon, a wicked, omnipotent vampire who serve humans–Arucard. Early in the saga, when a priest turned gruesome vampire dines on his flock, Hellsing is called in after the police and special forces sent to rescue them both turn up missing. All but one, a young woman named Victoria Seris, is turned to a hobbling ghoul. The predicament ends in a showdown, the vampire holding young Victoria in his grasp as Arucard takes aim. If Victoria lets the silver bullet from Arucard's gun pass through her, he promises to turn her, otherwise suffer whatever fate the priest has in store. She chooses to take Arucard as her master, and the bullet flies, sending her to the ground bleeding to death, and him thrust against the crucifix in a cloud of his own ashes. Arucard drinks, and a new vampire is born.

The bulk of volume one is spent fleshing out Victoria's struggle with her new undead life as a Hellsing sniper and her relationship with her new master, the colorful and diabolically engrossing Arucard. This makes for splendid viewing. Soon enough, however, the Vatican's own annihilator shows up, a human regenerator by the name of Creed—"We will crush your unholy body and salt the Earth with your dust"—yet another spectacular character. A battle between him and Arucard lays the seeds for what will surely be a spectacular series, melding gothic horror and divine intervention. All this and humans are creating vampires via computer chip. I'm in heaven.

"VAMPIRES LIVE AND WALK AMONG US AND HAVE A TENDENCY TO GO ON MURDEROUS RAMPAGES"



HELLSING

studio: **pioneer entertainment** rating: **16 & up** running time: **75 mins**

extras: Bilingual audio, trailer, music video, creditless opening, concept art collection, action figure info

play score

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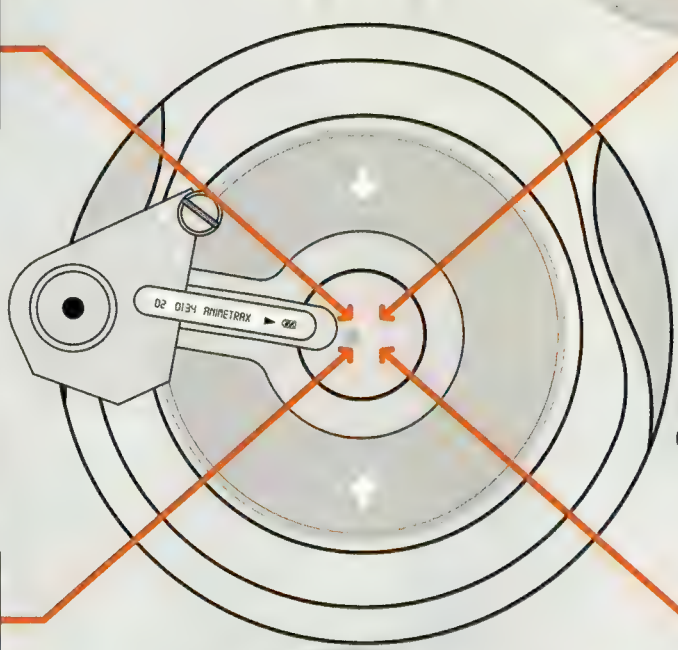

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HARRY POTTER

Warner Bros.
RATED PG

PLAY: *Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, The Matrix*—all veritable franchises for the ages, all concluding in the next few years. It's a joyous storm—a barrage of film, each an event all its own. Add to the pile this first chapter, or as author J.K. Rowling has dubbed it, "Year One." But *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* has one distinct characteristic: It's undeniably British. Couple that with a total fantasy free-for-all—wherein wizards and witches, goblins and giants exist—and you've got a flick that should appeal to anyone with an imagination. More importantly, the European sensibilities make it fresh, zooming it past the Spielberg guidebook, constructing an atmosphere all its own. Strictly, though, it is built with the child in mind—but it's really nothing anyone under 95 shouldn't be able to grasp, gulp and enjoy thoroughly. It begins like *The Wizard of Oz*, as the audience is brought into this brand new world after a brief tryst with the familiar (you see, the kingdom of sorcery is an underworld extension of reality). Harry (played to a key by Daniel Radcliffe), a boy of legend to anyone who has knowledge of magic, is quickly entered into Hogwarts, a school for the development of all things...er...magical. So for the next two hours, you'll watch Mr. Potter and his band of friends train for their fantastical merit badges—flying on broomsticks, waving wands, casting spells. He's guided mostly by the enormous, grizzly Hagrid (an infinitely charismatic Robbie Coltrane); but through the process, a conspiracy spurs. One of the teachers, through deviant use of his supernatural wit, is planning the theft of the Sorcerer's Stone. It's a shiny bit of rock, no more than a fistful, which gives off an ominous glow. Hold it—keep it—and you're immortal as long as it exists.

And as you can imagine, with such a powerful little stone, the plot gradually fades from playful to plundering. It gets dark—not midnight-blotted, but just dark enough to tease any fan of classic sci-fi.

VALUE: Fear not, this two-disc set is a storehouse for those with playful intentions. You can wander throughout Hogwarts' facility, mixing potions, conducting transfigurations, casting spells and a pocketful of other activities. It's like a budget PC game for kids after they've spun through the movie 100 times. As for the full-grown guru—well, there's not much to entice. An audio commentary with director Chris Columbus, or maybe master production designer Stuart Craig, should have been an obvious additive. For that, the DVD score goes down a notch. But it's still quite pleasant.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●●
dvd ●●●○○

THE MOTHMAN PROPH.

COLUMBIA/TRISTAR
RATED PG-13

PLAY: To defend this movie properly, one must first make this statement: *The Mothman Prophecies* is not a Richard Gere movie—at least not the typical kind. Here, director Mark Pellington, who hit gold with *Arlington Road*, spins a supernatural yarn about the mythical, future-telling mothmen that trot the globe. As the movie argues, the entities generally go unseen; but when sightings do come to fruition, disaster is probably lurking. It's surprising, really, to find such a taut, spirit-world jerker—one that tingles your spine, toys with your eyes, whirls you into a paranoid zone—that flew so far below the box-office radar. *Mothman* is damn eerie; it's ultra stylish. And for such an underdog, it comes installed with one of the most thrilling special effects climaxes since the disaster movie was invented.

VALUE: Considering it leaks cinematic style at every bend, at least one substantial feature would have been appreciated. Its lackluster theatrical performance probably resulted in such an elementary DVD, cataloging the "Half Light" music video, directed by Pellington, and a theatrical trailer as the bulk of its extras—that's it. A featurette, possibly on the real-life mothmen—since the film is based on actual events that author John A. Keel's experienced—would have been a fancy additive. At least there's always hope for Criterion.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●○○○○

ROLLERBALL

MGM
RATED R

PLAY: Maybe the budget ran dry, or maybe director John McTiernan realized that a remake of *Rollerball* was an awfully bad idea—either way, after only a few minutes, it's completely obvious that *MS3TK* will eventually dig into this dreary excuse for a movie. It should have been apparent from the get-go; the original, 70's version of *Rollerball* wasn't all that great either. Chris Klein, as a superstar rollerball player, and LL Cool J, as his best buddy on the future-sport circuit, represent the BAU (Bad Actor's Union) to a key. It's impossible for pretty boy Klein to lock onto such an aggressive role; he may play the hero, but cleaning up your teammate's bloodied body from the arena floor isn't a job for Abercrombie models. Even this special "R-rated" cut will have trouble keeping the couch-prone audience awake, even if Rebecca Romijn-Stamos strips off her bra and panties. You'll be howling incessantly, "How—oh how—could such an utter piece of sci-fi trash come from the director of *Predator*?"

VALUE: If you're actually interested in learning more about this future-sport knockoff, there are a few ditties burned onto the DVD—and they're actually more entertaining than the movie itself. Take the Rob Zombie music video for a spin; and "The Stunts of Rollerball" featurette will pretty much sum up the entire flick in a matter of cuts. Just watch that.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●○○○○
dvd ●●○○○

NEWSBYTES

edited by jon m gibson

. . . *Pulp* action: Five years after *Jackie Brown* sunk low at the box office, **Quentin Tarantino will get back behind the camera with *Kill Bill***, a Beijing-set action flick in the tradition of high-flying Asian cinema. Uma Thurman reunites with the dialogue king, playing a long-legged assassin called "The Bride," set on enacting revenge on her former employer (David Carradine). Filming begins this summer . . . Cameo culprits: Returning a favor, **writer-director Cameron Crowe, as well as sexy co-star Cameron Diaz, will appear in a split-second sequence in Steven Spielberg's summer sci-fi epic, *Minority Report*** (Spielberg appeared briefly in the party sequence in Crowe's *Vanilla Sky*). Also, keep an eye out for Spielberg, Tom Cruise, and Gwyneth Paltrow in *Austin Powers in Goldmember* . . . D-day: **The Tenacious D singing-songwriting duo, Jack Black and Kyle Glass, are set to take their stage show to the silver screen.** They're currently developing the script, which should take on a very similar tone to *This is Spinal Tap* . . . Head afire: Marvel Comics' Avi Arad has confirmed that **Nicolas Cage will, indeed, play the title role in special effects extravaganza, *Ghost Rider*** . . . Whip it good: **Frank Darabont, director *of The Shawshank Redemption*, will take the reins of *Indiana Jones 4* as screenwriter.** Adapted from

VANILLA SKY

WARNER BROS.
RATED R

PLAY: Vicious. It may seem like a negative word in context, but it's just the opposite when applied to *Vanilla Sky*. The film, by way of epiphany, is completely striking. Launching as a love story between *Rise Magazine* inheritor David (Tom Cruise) and Sofia (a delightful Penelope Cruz), the tale bends, twists and brews into something completely different every other minute. Director Cameron Crowe calls it "genre-less," drawn from the urge to make a movie that would never lead the audience in the direction perceived. There are little hints along the way—tiny ornaments scattered about miscellaneous frames—but nothing that will ever guide you to the delicate, *vicious* conclusion. Keep your eyes open.

VALUE: How ironic that the one DVD this year that truly deserves a "special edition" brand isn't labeled at all. Instead, it's buried treasure. Crowe, in one of the most enthralling commentaries available on disc, spews a lifetime of filmmaking knowledge in 135 minutes. And, oddly enough, it's all recorded on his living room rig—the doorbell buzzes, the phone rings, and his kids even come by to say goodnight to "daddy." Best of all, though, is his surprise call to Cruise; they dissect an intense scene by cell phone. "Hitting it Hard," a short featurette documenting the *Vanilla Sky* worldwide press tour, also deserves mad props.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●●●

SLACKERS

COLUMBIA/TRISTAR
RATED R

PLAY: The teen audience is getting increasingly more unpredictable, so a movie like *Slackers* would seem like a jiffy fit. It's ultimately about getting the girl, but along the way there's scamming, cheating, sex, psychotics, and some really raunchy situations. So basically, you're looking at a wacky spin on the *American Pie* mold—just a tad maturer—following the perils of crafty college seniors Dave, Sam and Jeff. The plot rattles off something like this: 1) Dave (Devon Sawa) meets Angela (James King); 2) Dave likes Angela; 3) Ethan (Jason Schwartzman) blackmails Dave for cheating on a midterm because he wants Angela too—in fact, he's obsessed; and 4) the gyp gets riskier. Will love prevail over graduating? It's not too tough to figure out, because it's the in-between antics that really matter in an offbeat comedy like this. And even though it may not be hysterically funny—the drop-a-load kind of laughs—it's mostly enjoyable all the way to the finish line (Schwartzman's character gets the most play; in one scene, he covets a hair doll made from the collected strains of Angela's golden locks). The one-take acting adds to the sincerity—or at least it seems like a low-budget rush job. Either way, that probably helped director Dewey Nicks capture some spontanity.

VALUE: Since *Slackers* was lost at the theater, it's pretty much on loser on DVD, too.

JON M GIBSON

movie ●●●○○
dvd ●○○○○

LEGEND: ULTIMATE ED.

UNIVERSAL
RATED PG

PLAY: It's hard to believe that Ridley Scott, director of *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and *Black Hawk Down*, could have ever directed such a pansy…er…fairy tale movie as *Legend*. Filled with goblins, unicorns and fairies, this classic tale of good versus evil is truly a child's storybook brought to life. When the Lord of Darkness (Tim Curry, in devilishly wicked role—and full body make-up), threatens to overthrow the perfect balance of good and light, it's time for Jack (played by a *really* young Tom Cruise) to grab a sword and defeat him before evil besets the land. When Jack's lovely lady, Lily (played by a 15-year-old Mia Sara), gets nabbed by the demonic one, Jack must face his own demons to save her.

VALUE: A must-buy for any fantasy movie lover. The first disc has the full "director's cut" with Jerry Goldsmith's original score (which is even longer than the "bootleg" European cut that's been floating around for years); and the second has the complete theatrical release with an isolated score by Tangerine Dream. A very informative "making-of" video stocks interviews with Scott, production designers and cinematographers. It's all do-justice on this fantasy disc, considering the filmmakers worked overtime. After building an entire forest on a massive soundstage, every single line of dialogue had to be replaced in post-production; the tropical noise was overwhelming.

TOM HAM

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●●●

STARSHIP TROOPERS

COLUMBIA/TRI-STAR
RATED R

PLAY: I went to see *Starship Troopers* the day it hit theaters, and can still remember walking out of the theater thinking I'd just seen the greatest science fiction film ever made. The way director Paul Verhoeven portrayed a fascist society, coercing its most affluent and beauteous young into "federal service" to serve the war machine, combined with the way the film sent up WW2 propaganda films, was utterly fascinating, especially as layers over one of the most controversial science fiction novels of the '50s. My next memory is the shock and dismay of realizing that nearly every mainstream movie critic not only didn't get it, but felt compelled to attack it, save for the only magazine I trust for film reviews, *Entertainment Weekly*, which awarded it a B+. Thanks Owen. (And while I'm at it, thanks to Lisa, too, for giving *The 13th Warrior* an A-.)

VALUE: The new featurette, a truly intriguing chronicle of the film by Paul and his entire support staff, is the justification I've been searching for—and is damn compelling viewing, too. Special effects comparisons and featurettes, concept art, screen tests, storyboards, scene deconstruction commentaries, deleted scenes, high-definition widescreen, Dolby 5.1, and Denise Richards dressed up like a schoolgirl—well, that's just icing on the cake. Isn't it time you got to know the bug?

DAVE HALVERSON

movie ●●●●●
dvd ●●●●●

THE OTHERS

DIMESNION FILMS
RATED PG-13

PLAY: What makes *The Others* such a brilliant, masterful piece of moviemaking is how it manages to scare the crap out of you by using old-fashioned haunts. There are no dangling corpses or bloodstained axes here, folks. Instead, you get bumps in the night, doors creaking open, and chilling whispers that will make your skin crawl. Nicole Kidman plays a convincing single mother trying to maintain her sanity amidst mysterious happenings at her massive estate. Through excellent direction and a great supporting cast, you can't help but look over your shoulder while watching this film. Is *The Others* a horror movie? Not in the least, it's much scarier—it messes with your mind. Where this psychological thriller may have been lost in the shuffle amongst other "bigger" movies released at the same time, it's Kidman's solid performance that makes this creeper stand out.

VALUE: Great value for this double-disc set. An original documentary, "A Look Inside *The Others*," showcases interviews with Kidman, director Alejandro Amenábar (who helmed *Open Your Eyes*, the basis for *Vanilla Sky*) and other key members of the cast. There's also a cool special effects featurette on the second disc charting how some of the eeriest scenes were filmed. Just one complaint: Although the movie sounds great under 5.1, it really could've used a DTS track.

TOM HAM

movie ●●●●○
dvd ●●●●○

a story by franchise producer George Lucas, the movie will reportedly reunite Indy with ex-onscreen-lovers Karen Allen and Kate Capshaw, and even a son. M. Night Shyamalan, *Sixth Sense* director and longtime fanatic of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, has been flagged as a potential director. Expect a July 2005 release . . . Bosley says "bye bye": After reportedly clashing with director McG on set of the first *Charlie's Angels*, **Bill Murray will *not* be returning to his much coveted role of Bosley in the 2003 sequel.** Instead, Bernie Mac, star of his self-titled sitcom on Fox, will replace him as the angels' liaison . . More *Matrix*: Beginning this fall, **Warner Bros. will begin uploading progressive episodes from their 10-part *Animatrix* project to www.whatisthematrix.com.** Each short film will be directed by a handful of various talent (four by Larry and Andy Wachowski, with the rest by well-known Japanese anime artists). The 10th installment will act as a prequel to *The Matrix Reloaded* . . . New mutants: **Alan Cumming, recognized for his supporting roles in *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Goldeneye*, is set to play Nightcrawler**, the skinny, teleporting superhero, in *X* . Pyro, a teenager able to manipulate fire, will also join Professor Xavier's school . . . Leather pleasure: **A first glimpse of Jennifer Garner as Elektra (see right) on set of the live-action Daredevil movie . . .**

Clad in leather, Elektra lives

Black Hawk Down
Columbia/TriStar
AVAILABLE NOW

BLACK HAWK LANDING

Being an interview with Ridley Scott and Jerry Bruckheimer as they discuss the emerging home video format that is DVD, the importance of "director's cuts," and what kind of movie *9/11* would make.

Ridley Scott. Jerry Bruckheimer. Both are names that beckon more than just the phrase "Hollywood playboy." Each is a legend in their own right: Scott has classics like *Blade Runner*, *Alien*, and *Gladiator* resting comfortable on his mantle; and Bruckheimer has infinitely more—and even though some many not be classics, the box office has dubbed them "blockbusters" many times over. With *Black Hawk Down* being their first collaboration, the duo—who couldn't be more dissimilar—took a break from their behind-the-lens activities to indulge in some afterthoughts.

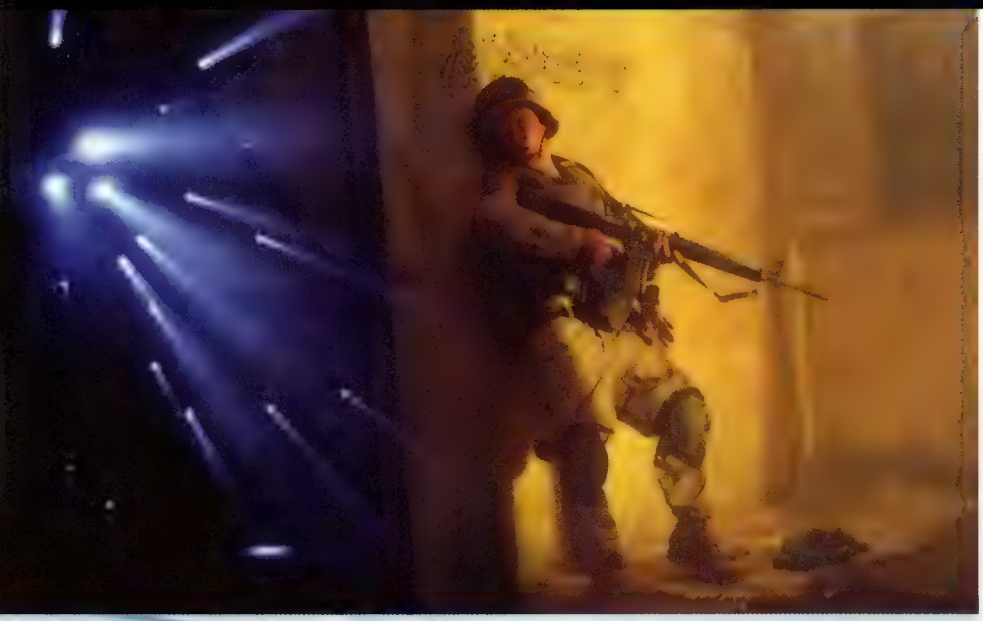
as told to **jon m gibson**

As a director who embraces the "director's cut," how important is DVD to you?
Scott: Fundamentally, I always find that most of the films that I put out are essentially the director's cuts. And part of the process with the director's cut is the leaving behind of certain aspects that we don't feel necessary, because, you know, they aren't necessarily part of the dynamic of the story. And therefore, what is useful about the DVD—particularly for the real film buffs—is they get to see why we left it out, what we left out. And of course, that's an educational process. But, for the most part, you're pretty much seeing the director's cut on anything I do.

If you could return to any of your earlier films, which ones would you like to with DVD?
Bruckheimer: Yeah, sure. I'd love to have all my movies on DVD. I think, you know, I'm chagrined that some of them still aren't on disc, because it'd be great to visit some of these films that we made back in the '80s that haven't been on DVD. First of all, we can get the sound a lot better, because of digital technology, if they would allow us to digitally remix the films. I would love them to be able...for kids to view them and adults to view them, and see the process at least from a historic standpoint from the filmmakers.
Scott: In turn, I'm actually going back through all the films now for reprint and remix. And I've now actually got as far back as the first one, so *Duelists* is actually now being digitally remixed, and we revisited the original negative, and it was all like yesterday.

Aren't you working on *Blade Runner* as well?
Scott: Yeah, that's done. That'll come out probably, I hope as a three-disc pack, which will have "cut one," which is '79, "cut two" '81, and then the version now, which will be with certain additions and the removal of voice-over. But in there, one of the discs covers all kinds of interviews which are really interesting. I don't know how they managed to dig into all that old material and find all these people, sort of the woodwork. So that was fascinating. It's like a library inside the disc.

Mr. Bruckheimer, your producing style has been described as more Americana and patriotic; while, Mr. Scott, your films lean more towards a documentary or a foreign viewpoint. Considering this is an American story, do you think your styles clashed on the film, or did they compliment each other?
Bruckheimer: I think that the patriotism comes from the director as well as the producer *and* the writer. So if the films are patriotic and if you considered *Top Gun* patriotic, it was done by Ridley's brother, who's also a foreigner. So it's a combination of what Tony and the writer and everybody else saw in the movie. Our styles didn't clash at all. I think Ridley made the picture he wanted to make, and is enormously proud of the movie that he made. I think it's brilliant.
Scott: Besides, what you do when you get the script to where you need to have it, everybody acknowledges that blueprint. And the blueprint will dictate what you're doing.
Technique, of course, comes into play, and the route that we took this down was to go with a more uncompromising, almost documentary fashion, as if you were literally putting an audience member as part of Chalk 4 or Chalk 5 or Chalk 6. So you get to put on your helmet and carry a rifle if you watch this one.



As a director, what style do you prefer more: the reality/documentary-based style or the sci-fi/fantasy style of films?
Scott: Everything. Everything. Anything, depending on what the order of the day is, depending on what piece of material, to what the subject is. I like a film, such as *American Beauty*. And I like *Spider-Man*.

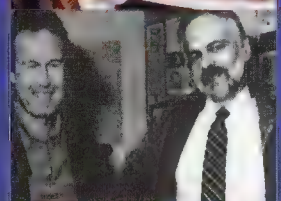
Do you think the events that happened on 9/11 had any kind of effect on the release of the film at that time at all? And are there any other subjects going on in the world right now you'd like to see—or that you'd like to do—of film about?
Scott: Well, that's very interesting, actually, because the result of 9/11, of course, did affect huge discussions in every facet and every walk of life. I think Jerry and I had, once we recovered from the shock—if that's the word, recover—was, of course, we have to, as Bush said, get back to work. The best you can do is get back to work. So we resumed the process of things—what do we do with the movie? Should we put this movie back 11 months? And then, almost within 24 hours we all met—which included Joe [Roth] and Revolution Studios saying, well this book was entirely relevant, so why don't we get it out as fast as possible. So what we did was bring the film forward, essentially. Where does film start to run parallel to journalism? Because, last night, you have a huge discussion with this new revelation that the government knew. And that someone dropped the ball heavily in the FBI. Or where was the ball dropped on some critical information, which they were told in August that this was afoot. There were pilots being trained. And who the hell would not take that seriously? Because I cannot believe that any president, whoever he is, from whatever side or faction, would not take that kind of information as very serious, indeed, and not simply follow through. And there's somebody in the program talking about FBI needing an update on technology. And, I thought, Holy shit! I thought they were right up to speed. And what's the matter with picking up the goddamn telephone and saying to somebody, did you read this morning? Now, right there, to me, is a film... You know, life is always far, far stranger than fiction.

"FUNDAMENTALLY, I ALWAYS FIND THAT MOST OF THE FILMS THAT I PUT OUT ARE ESSENTIALLY THE DIRECTOR'S CUTS."

-Ridley Scott

NEW 'BLADE RUNNER' BOX SET ON THE WAY

"[The new *Blade Runner* DVD] is done. That'll come out probably, I hope as a three-disc pack, which will have "cut one," which is '79, "cut two" '81, and then the version now, which will be with certain additions and the removal of voice-over. But in there, one of the discs covers all kinds of interviews which are really interesting. I don't know how they managed to dig into all that old material and find all these people, sort of the woodwork. So that was fascinating. It's like a library inside the disc."



top harrison ford in ridley scott's sci-fi classic *blade runner*
bottom ridley scott and author philip k. dick, writer of "do androids dream of electric sheep," the novel that inspired *blade runner*

Crank Yankers
Comedy Central
10:30PM/9:30 (ET/PT)

PUPPETS WITHOUT FACES

Prank calls are no longer exclusive to humankind. Comedy Central's latest, *Crank Yankers*, edges the classic art into the 21st century, using puppets for the most devious of things.

as told to **jon m gibson**

You'll single-handedly be responsible for the collapse of Comedy Central once *Crank Yankers* airs. Do you care to comment?
[laughs] You know what's funny—you know who you sound like? You really sound like Dane Cook, one of the guys we used on *Crank Yankers*. He's done a few. He did a guy who was in a wheelchair, he couldn't use his legs, he called a library…ah, f—k it! Listen, just forget it. So we'll be single-handedly responsible for the downfall of Comedy Central—was that the question?

Yeah, how do you feel about that?
I'm tickled pink. It's been a long time coming.

Come on, you show puppet nips and puppet dicks. The censors can't be happy about that.
You know, it's weird. There's a lot of gray area—or maybe they should call it *pink* area—in censorship. [laughs] I don't know if there was ever a rulebook written on puppet dongs. We seem to explore new ground each time we do something.

There's that strip club scene in one of the first episodes, where a blind stripper calls to ask if they will allow her seeing eye dog on stage while she dances. That was quite "inventive," to say the least.
I know this isn't gonna sound great. You know, the blind stripper in the strip club—I found that *tit-illating*. I know, it sounds sad.

So you've ogled some blind strippers on The Strip before?
My original idea was to put her in a wheel chair and say that they needed to build a ramp up to the stage. But I think Jimmy [Kimmel] said, "Let's make her blind so she has to bring her dog up there." But no, I've never seen a handicapped stripper—and I hope never to.

What's the worst you've seen?
I've seen the ones that are handicapped by their verbal skills. Ones that talk a lot about kids and their old man beating on them. I find that to be offensive, as a patron of the strip club.

Can't you get arrested for what you're doing?

"THERE'S A LOT OF GRAY AREA—OR MAYBE THEY SHOULD CALL IT *PINK* AREA—IN CENSORSHIP. I DON'T KNOW IF THERE WAS EVER A RULEBOOK WRITTEN ON PUPPET DONGS."

These calls? Not in the two-party consent states, like New York and Nevada. There's a handful of other places we can call. Here's the dillio: You have to make it *from* a state that will allow it and *to* a state to allow it. We knew before we got started that we had to comply with this shit.

Was it just a hobby before the show?
The reality is, that every comedian loves one of these shows. And Jimmy's been doing it his whole life. Jimmy just decided that this would be a good idea for a show and we agreed with him and we set out to do it. But it wasn't as if we had a bunch of calls banked and decided to do a show built on those. Once we decided to do the show, we did all the calls.

When you were just a wee lad, did you dream of getting a paycheck for being crude?
I said it to Jimmy when we walked into the recording studio in Nevada to do these things for the first time, "This is the culmination of a life's work for you, isn't it? I mean, look at this. You have a totally high-end production facility here, a bunch of engineers, PAs and writers and they're all sittin' around waiting for you to sit down and make some prank phone calls." For me, and I would imagine for Jimmy, having a sense of humor or popping off or speaking out of turn was considered a liability—certainly not a gift. I spent the better part of my childhood having people tell me to "shut up," "be quiet," "this is not gonna work." They were saying "You've gotta shut up, you've gotta focus, you've gotta study or you're never gonna be able to find a job." Ironically, now we make money for doing the shit we were doing for free in high school.

Are you the type of guy that gives shit to the drive-through speaker?
No, I don't f—k with people unless someone's paying me now. I'm very polite. Actually, I can be a dick. What I mean is, when comedy becomes your business, you get in the habit of getting paid for it and then you don't want to be funny went you're not getting paid for it. So now I'm ultra-serious all the time, unless someone pays me.

How much is it gonna take?
It varies. Weekends are more. I end up just getting whipped up about a certain subject and ranting about it for a half an hour straight, but it usually doesn't end up being that funny—it just scares people.

Do you throw things during your anger rants?
I don't throw things, but I do this crazy shadowboxing sort of dance that is lovely and intimidating at the same time.

What about defunct phone calls?
Oh, sure. The usual hangin' up, or people not signing off, or just misunderstandings, or never getting to talk to the person you wanted to talk to. Yeah, there was tons of that.

So, I'm an amateur in the art of f—king with people. Any career advice?
I tell ya, f—kin' with people takes a lot outta you. People think it's all shits and giggles. But it strains you to really f—k with people.

Do you want to plug any energy drinks, vitamins?
After doing ten calls were you're just f—king with people, you do. You've got to stand up and walk around a little bit and shake it loose. It takes it out of you. I know, it sounds ridiculous.

You've been corrupting *The Man Show* boy for quite some time now. Where are his parents and what are you feeding him?
[laughs] He eats nothing but Lady Fingers. And his parents, I saw them last week—they were here, he was here—and they love it. But in a bizarre way.

Do you want fries with that?
Yeah, I do. But you know what? I like to dip them in barbecue sauce and not in ketchup.

What about mayonnaise?
Nah, that's too Midwest for me.

No, that's strictly Canadian.
Wherever it gets cold, and their mind freezes and they start dipping stuff into *anything*.

The Powerpuff Girls Movie
Warner Bros.
JULY 3

'PUFF SAID

Do the time warp with The Powerpuff Girls as they prepare for their first adventure as superheroes—but this time, their enormous heads are stretched across the silver screen instead of your TV set.

as told to **jon m gibson**

Welcome to the world of Craig McCraken. In it, monkeys are, more often than not, corrupted by evil, towns are called "Townsville," and wee lasses with pigtails tend to be the only thing that stands between super-villains and world domination. Starting this month, his insanely cute characters from those adorably huge heads, once only inches, will stretch to yardsticks across. McCraken spreads the word below:

Is this *thee* Craig McCraken?
That's me

Okay, just making sure. So, these girls of yours—Bubbles, Blossom, and Buttercup—are everywhere. They're not even old enough to drink, let alone see a PG-rated movie without permission.
Yeah, I know. They couldn't even see their own film

How did such little girls become so enormously popular?
I don't know. I guess people just like the show and like the characters and like the stories we were telling—and it all seemed to hit at the right time

You never saw it coming, though?
No, no. I thought it was going to be a cult hit. I thought college kids would watch it or whatever, and that would be the best. And maybe you could get the tape on eBay years from now and reminisce about it.

To imagine, *The Whoop-Ass Girls* would turn into something as recognizable as Michael Jackson.
Yeah. it was a student film at Cal Arts

You should have kept the title.
Yeah, I know. We almost did. We recorded the first pilot back in '94 with *Whoop Ass* and I was like, "I can't believe they're letting me do this!" Then, I guess, some cable buyer in the Midwest said, "We're not gonna buy time on a show called *The Whoop-Ass Girls*." So, they went, "Oh, okay We're gonna have to change that."

Have there been any behind-the-scenes bickering within the trio?
With the girls? No, no, no. They accept Blossom—she's the fulcrum between the two of 'em. Buttercup wants to be the leader. but she can't handle it.

So what kind of makeover are they getting for the big screen?
Not really a makeover. They're pretty much the same as they were in the show, we've just had a lot more control of the whole process. It just looks a lot slicker. We're able to do things technically that we weren't able to do in the series It's all still hand-drawn, hand-painted and hand-animated, but it's digitally put into the computer, so we're able to control the shots a little more and how everything looks. It's not being shot onto film directly

More sweeping pans?
Yeah, yeah. A little more multi-plane, just more depth to the shots. Kind of a "heightened" version of the series

New villains?
Mojo's in it, and there's some new villains—new guys. The basic plot is: It's the girl's first adventure. So they're just born with superpowers, but they're not superheroes. It's less of an origin about how they get their powers, and it's more of an origin about what made them decide to be superheroes—what made them decide to use their powers to fight crime

Do you think, as the girls grow older that they'll sag? Their heads are mighty enormous and they have absolutely no support.

Well, that's part of their power. They've got good strong spines. They're like any cartoon character: they're not gonna age. They're gonna stay frozen, because I'm a big believer in that. Popeye's always that age, and Charlie Brown's always that age and you never see his parents.

Will you ever allow a live-action Japanese version of *The Powerpuff Girls* to be made?
If it gets made without my permission, I'm sure there's nothing I can do about it. The thing is, making them real girls defines them too much—it takes them out of that cartoony-ness and iconic-ness of them.

So if you were a Powerpuff Girl yourself, which one would you be?
I think I'm an amalgam of all three. The girls are myself split into three personalities—it kinda depends on what day you're talking to me. I'm probably closer to being the Professor and the Mayor—and Mojo, as well.

Mojo, huh? You have a dark side?
You know, wanting to control everyone during things are very [laughs]

What about the rating—you're not going to spoon-feed us any morals about sharing your Legos, are you?
Hopefully we're PG. We haven't gotten our rating yet. The first cut of the movie was referred to as the "*Akira* Cut," and it was a little too intense and a little too violent. We've kind of lightened it a bit. It was just action-packed and pretty visceral. It was really cool, but it was a little too much. And hopefully all that extra stuff will show up on the DVD.

Any spin-off plans: *The Powerpuff Chimps, Powerpuff Aardvarks, Powerpuff Platypuses?*
Probably not—just try to keep it pure. Once you start gettin' to that point—like they did on *The Flintstones*, where you have The Great Gazoo and Fred and Barney being cops—it's time to hang up.

What would happen, say, if I dropped a packet of ketchup into that vat of "sugar, spice and everything nice?"
Maybe the girls would be slightly Italian, I think. [laughs]

"IT'S ALL STILL HAND-DRAWN AND HAND-ANIMATED, BUT IT'S DIGITALLY PUT INTO THE COMPUTER, SO WE'RE ABLE TO CONTROL THE SHOTS A LITTLE MORE AND HOW EVERYTHING LOOKS."

Windtalkers
MGM
IN THEATERS NOW

WORLD WAR WOO

Action auteur John Woo merges his trademark ballet of bullets with the rough climate of World War II. The battlefield will never be the same.

as told to jon m gibson

Action has always been the name of the game for John Woo. He came to the States in 1993 to film *Hard Target*, straight off the success of his Hong Kong affair with Chow Yun-Fat. Now, after becoming a U.S. citizen, he's beginning his transition into other genres with *Windtalkers*, an epic story of bullets, bombshells, and the bond of friendship amidst a world at war. Woo, taking a break from his lunch, talked about this much-lauded changeover, the perils of Hollywood filmmaking, and why a love story is more appealing than bloodshed—at least right now.

Why World War II as a setting? It's a far cry from your other films.
I always wanted to, because I'm big into war movies—it's one of my dreams. Especially after I heard about this story—when the writer pitched the idea to me, I was crying and jumping out of my chair. I was amazed by the code-talkers and the Navajo people; they have done so much for the country. Because of their work, they saved a lot of Marines and also helped to win the war. So I thought the story should be told. The whole story was so emotional—all about friendship. Friendship is very important in my life. And especially since I'm a [United States] citizen now, I thought I had a duty to tell this story so young people know about this part of history.

You did manage to tap into a lot of emotion, but you've coupled that with your trademark style of action as well. Was it difficult to balance the two?
Yeah, it was pretty difficult and pretty challenging. I tried to keep a good balance between the action and the drama, because the drama was very important in the film. So in the action sequences, I tried to change my style unlike I would have done before. Usually, my kind of action is very stylish and has a lot of special technique. But in this film, I tried to be honest—I tried to make it real. Also, to make all the action sequences emotional. I wanted the audience to care more about the characters and get more involved. There's little stories during the action, like the brotherhood, the order in how they make decisions. I tried to [give it] more humanity.

Do you see yourself moving into more different genres of film from here? Obviously, with *Windtalkers*, you've taken the first step.
That's what I'm trying to do—I'm trying to change. My next project, *Men of Destiny*, is a story about the Chinese and the Irish building a railroad in America in the 19th century. The whole idea is: These two groups of people work on the railroad and there is a lot of conflict, and also a lot of racial problems. But during the process, they learn how to work together and come together. At the end, they become friends and they build their dream together. So the whole movie shows how these two groups of people overcome all kinds of problems—all kinds of difficulty and disaster. And they are all looking for hope. It is a very meaningful project to me. Since I've had a chance to work in movies, I see myself as a bridge. I always try and bring good things from the East and the great things from the West and bring them together.

Any other films that you've been contemplating?
Another project I have a lot of interest to do is a western. A western, unlike those traditional kinds of western, because it is also a romantic love story. It is a story about before the war of the Alamo; there's another war between the Texans and the Mexicans. Somehow, one of the characters is in love with a Mexican girl—kind of like a *Romeo and Juliet* and kind of like a Greek tragedy. Historical and romantic.

You've probably gotten this question a lot, but how would you compare the Hong Kong film climate to the U.S.?
I enjoy making films in both ways. Unfortunately, in Hong Kong, the market is so small. The only market we had before was *only* action and comedy. But, in Hollywood, I have the chance to try different things. Also, an opportunity to learn from the people in Hollywood—there are so many choices and so many great people to work with. Still, in Hollywood, there's a lot of problems for me, because I'll never get used to the system. Even though I've made several successful movies, I still didn't like some of the things that happened. It's so complicated. Though, I must say, the people I work with are all very nice and we respect each other. The people here are so dedicated. We have gained so much influence from each other; we have learned so much from American films, and you can also see some American films that have taken something from Hong Kong films. It think it makes movies look a little more interesting.

Is Hong Kong very close-knit, very much like a family—vs. Hollywood, where it's a massive machine churning out movie after movie? Is that a good analogy?
Well, to make a film in Hong Kong is very simple. It's pretty down-to-earth; everyone works as a family. There's not much politics and no games—people only concentrate to make the film.

Traditionally, you've always worked with male leads. Has there ever been a project that's interested you, possibly featuring a female star?
Yeah, yeah, definitely. I've always wanted to make a love story or a musical, and I've also wanted to make a strong, female character. We're looking for that kind of script. I will make it as strong as a male bond. I've always wanted to make a female hero. A writer pitched an idea to me—it was a love story. It's the story of a blind girl. The movie has a similar tone to *The Miracle Worker*.

Do you think you'll continually drift away from the action drama, or will you come back?
I think I will come back and forth. Of course, I would like to try something without action. Actually, I love drama. I really want to make a strong drama. But, if necessary, I will go back and make action films—but it will have great meaning.

Don't you think that will be tough, though? You're name is synonymous with the action genre.
It's a little tough, but I think the audience will get used to my style. My kind of movie, even though they involve a lot of action, I also put a lot of humor and emotion in them. So if I make a movie without action, I hope people will understand it.

So will you ever work with Chow Yun-Fat again?
[Gets excited, laughing] Yeah, my next project. I'm sorry, I forgot to mention that. *Men of Destiny* is going to be with Chow Yun-Fat and Nicolas Cage—two good friends. Both of them have been looking forward to working together. And, of course, I've always wanted to work with Chow Yun-Fat again—he's an amazing actor and a good friend. This is an amazing project for him; he has such great character and charisma.

Alright, one final question: If George Lucas offered you *Episode III*, would you take it?
[laughs] I love *Star Wars*. If he offered it to me, it would depend on the script. I don't know, because I'm a big *Star Wars* fan. If the story was a strong drama, then I would love it. On the other hand, I'm not good with special effects.

"I WAS AMAZED BY THE CODE-TALKERS AND THE NAVAJO PEOPLE; THEY HAVE DONE SO MUCH FOR THE COUNTRY."

POWER PUFFS

interview enrique galvez

Aside from being one of Japan's most successful J-Pop sensations, Puffy AmiYumi has become a cultural phenomenon in their native home. There's really no other way to describe the duo and their fusion of rock & roll, fashion and Japanese sensibility which fuels their most memorable songs as evident in their second U.S. release, "An Illustrated history," a compilation of songs that spans the last five years of their career. Take, for example, "That's The Way It Is," with its Beatles-esque-sounding guitars and their harmonious vocal delivery that is completely infectious and catchy—guaranteed to stay in your head for weeks. Puffy does what Japan does best: take a foreign idea, in this case a foreign sound, and re-engineer it for a new culture, giving a fresh new appeal which works wonderfully for them. If you've been to Japan, you've noticed Puffy. You don't need a keen eye for the kitsch and hip because they are everywhere. Puffy is not just about music. They have become a mini-enterprise reaching into other forums from children's books to video games to Puffy action figures that come complete with jersey, bandana, and microphone. They even host an extremely popular variety show "PAPAPAPA PUFFY." The Puffy AmiYumi invasion has just begun!
Make sure to catch them in their first U.S. tour, either solo or opening for the B-52s. Many thanks to the wonderful people at Sony/Antinos Management for helping us set up this interview.. For more information on their tour, please check out Puffy AmiYumi's official website http://www.puffyamiyumi.com.

Record Label: Sony
Latest Album:

First off, congratulations on your second record released in the U.S. and your first U.S. tour.
Both: Thank you!

***An Illustrated History* covers the last five years of your career. Did you handpick all the songs?**
Ami: Uh, some songs were singles released in Japan. We consulted with the U.S. staff and got some advice—like "Love So Pure" is popular for U.S. audiences.
Yumi: It was collaboration with U.S. staff, Japanese staff and us. We talked and we picked.

Do you have a favorite song?
Yumi: It's tough to decide the best song or second best one from this collection.

Your music seems to be strongly connected with the sounds of 60's rock. Growing up in Japan, how where you exposed to the that sound?
Ami: Of course, we like '60s taste. However, we always talk to Tamio-san (Tamio Okuda/producer) and other producers, and have meetings with them. And we figure out what kind of song we should try next. Or sometimes we listen to the whole album and find out what kind of sound is missing, and if we add this song, whether it's really good for the concert audience. So it's not like Puffy AmiYumi is known as liking '60s or '70s music. We were not playing any instruments or music before becoming Puffy AmiYumi. Let me give you an analogy. We were given to Tamio Okuda as a whole, blank, white image. Then many other great musicians colored Puffy AmiYumi with great music. We hope that great musicians have had fun with this project.

Do you have plans to continue singing in English?
Yumi: We don't think we'll be releasing every song in English. We are growing up in Japan and we are Japanese. We like the style of particular Japanese phrasings and sounds. We keep these as very important things when we write. Singing in English is a big challenge to us. But I think it's a really important challenge also. So we try and we will try. But... it's not easy at all. So we can't promise to release songs in English constantly.

It is very common style that one producer takes care of several musicians in Japan, like producer Tsunk (*Morning Musume, Minimoni, Pucchimoni*) or Komuro Tetsuya (*Globe, Ami Suzuki, TRF, Namie Amuro*). So the music has a little bit of similarity, commonly referred to as the "Tsunk Family" and "Komuro Family" sound. Your producer, ex-drummer-singer Jelly Fish, Andy Sturmer, produced Tamio Okuda and Yuki (ex-Judy-and-Mary). How do you feel about that and do you feel any similarity with their songs?
Yumi: When Andy creates songs for us, it's not like he creates a lot of songs on the side and he divides them among many different singers. He creates music like "what's Puffy AmiYumi's color; what song fits Puffy AmiYumi" and creates music for us. So we don't worry that other artists who Andy produces will all sound similar to us.

I heard you have a very diverse taste in music. What's in your CD players?
Yumi: Let's see.
Ami: I recently bought [new albums from] White Stripes and The Hives. I have been listening to them these days. Yumi-Chan, haven't you been to the any record stores yet?
Yumi: No!

What inspires your fashion?
Yumi: We don't do it on purpose. We are the same as normal kids. We don't dress up like weirdos in the street neither. We are dressed in a common Japanese style. Maybe it's rare here. If people around us start to say its hip, we appreciate that. But we are not thinking about it so much. [laughs]

I love your cartoon characters designed by Rodney Greenblat, character

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designer for *Parappa the Rappa*.
Yumi: One of our staff showed us some Rodney drawings, and we said, "These are so cute!" and he has drawn our covers ever since he did our second single.

How did Thunder Bunny and Wonder Meow happen?
Ami: About Thunder Bunny: When we went to his studio in New York, I saw an uncompleted picture of Thunder Bunny. That was really cute! Rodney knows I like rabbits a lot. And he goes, "If I finish this Thunder Bunny picture book, would you be interested in translating it in Japanese?" I said, "yes"—and I did. Yumi needed a character also. She likes cats. And she has very cute cats of her own also. She showed her cats to Rodney and asked him if he would draw a cat character. And he created Wonder Meow for Yumi. So that's the behind-the-scene story of Rodney and us.

On your Japanese TV show *Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Puffy* you are known as The Dancing Queen on *DDR*—you even beat Namie Amuro!
Ami: That's right—that's the truth!

On a trip to Japan, I picked up a copy of the PSOne *Puffy AmiYumi* game. I spend a lot of time saving you from soda cans—or maybe it was beer cans!
Puffy: [laughs] GunCon! GunCon!
Ami: We told them that we'd like to have gun-shooting style.

What manga are you reading right now?
Ami: Right now, I am reading *Detective Boy Conan*, the newest movie's manga. Before I came to L.A., I bought this in the middle of our tour in Japan. I brought it to read in the hotel. Basically, I like Osamu Tezuka and Hayao Miyazaki titles a lot.

How about you, Yumi?
Yumi: I like *Berserk* and *Monster*. I like "shoujo" manga a lot as well.

Ami, we heard that you are a serious collector of choco eggs and other cute & adorable things. Is there anything new that you are collecting?
Ami: I haven't been collecting anything right now. My work is getting too busy. I feel my heart needs a little healing. My heart is little sick. [laughs] Because of that, I am taking care of plants and bonsai trees.

Yumi, we've seen you act in commercials; you are very good! Is there a possible acting career in you future?
Yumi: When I heard the CM (an abbreviation for "commercial" in Japanese) offer, I liked the CM series. And the main character was cute and sounded fun to do. That's why I did it. But it's not like I wanted to be an actress or anything.

What is your impression of L.A.?
Yumi: It's always the same, wherever we go—Japan or U.S. We try our best, as usual. We are looking forward to having a fun time.

Any last words for your new American fans?
Yumi: Ami-chan is wise, because of reading manga and watching tons of anime.
Ami: My education is almost all from anime and manga.
Both: So kids, if you like manga or anime, read more manga! Watch more anime! If you like anime, manga, and video-games, go all the way! And study hard!

ANATOMY OF AN E3 PARTY, PLUS NIKKA COSTA!

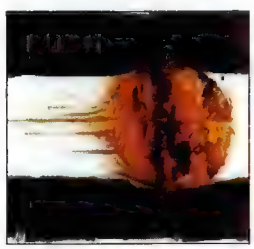
If burrowing through a standing herd of people trapped in a single-file current of slow-moving humanity while balancing a 6-oz. plastic cup brimming with a concoction you pray will make it all seem "fun" sounds fun, well then, welcome to party town, E3 style! That drink you're trying not to spill, by the way, took you an hour to get at the four-deep bar where you lost your buzz from the first one waiting for it, so don't spill it! But hey, you've made the scene! Then again, in the event you do see someone you know, it's always fun to step out of traffic and carry on a pleasant conversation, yelling and spitting into each other's ear. "Who's playing?!!" "Nikka Costa!!" "I don't know, but, who's playing?!!" "Never mind! Who are you here with?!! "Oh, I think I've heard them!! They're good!! Okay bye!! You are?!! Shit, why did you tell me that? I have to go now!!

I don't normally go to E3 parties, but this year, the Xbox bash looked so like a scene out Gotham City I couldn't resist. Plus, the lure of seeing Garbage in small venue was to good to pass up.

Standing in the herd within a few feet of the stage in one of the many ballrooms, I found myself waiting for Nikka Costa to take the stage. I had no idea who she was, but I was praying for anything to take my mind of where I actually was, standing behind a girl with fairy wings, which I tasted at least twice. Who were most of these people? I've been in the industry 12 years and I recognize no one. And where are all the people that asked if I'd be here? Probably eating room service, watching in-room movies. Much to my surprise and delight, Nikka Costa it turned out is the rockin'est female act I've since The Motels, with a band to match. They dished out a high-energy performance that I'd have gladly bought a ticket to see. Nikka came out expecting to rock out to a limp crowd of gamer nerds, but quickly realized, "Hey, these are console gamers! Drunk console gamers!" and brought the house down to thunderous ovations. I bought her CD the next day and, although it's more polished then her passionate live show, it's every bit as good. Anyway, the night, as zoo'd as it was, was shaping up nicely. From there, making our way, slowly, into the room where Garbage was scheduled to take the stage at 11:30 the sign read, "capacity 750." Too bad there were at least 700 people attempting to get into the room (and looking very confused in the process), which was already completely stuffed to at least double capacity. We took that as our cue to call it a night while there was still the off chance that within' the confines of downtown LA, a swill hole of a downtown if their ever was one, there might be a decent restaurant open.

As I dined on my Fillet O' Fish thing and imitation meat burger, I swore then and there to sell my party passes next year and just say I was their, like everyone else.

music reviews



Band: Rush
Album: Vapor Trails
Record Label: Mercury

Somehow Rush have honed their sound perfectly (after a seven-year hiatus) in such a way as to appease long time fans–present company included—and attract those in search of music that delves beneath the norm just deep enough, without drifting off into lala land. Like all of their best work, *Vapor Trails* barely sinks in the first few times you gleam over it, then after a half dozen or so passes its brilliance begins to really resonate. Eventually every track on the record speaks to you in its own special way, the mark of a truly great Rush album. Geddy hits his highest highs and lowest lows and never looks back, Alex's signature guitar licks make up for their overly synthesized last few efforts, and Neil, well, what can you say about Mr. Peart: he's still the greatest drummer in the world. With the trials and tribulations that kept them out of the limelight for seven years behind them, the need to ration Vapor Trails has been swept away, replaced by the notion that Rush may indeed be all the way back.

Whether you have questions, criticisms—or if you just need to vent or say what's on your mind—write us here at **play**. It's time to get a major forum going…off-line. **Email your queries and concerns to:**

letters@play-magazine.com

ASK AND YE SHALL RECIEVE

Unlike the majority of your readers, I've pretty much given up on games of this generation (128-bit), save for a few exceptions (Orta.....Smilebit's Trigun game....Ikaruga DC??). However, my love and praise of Anime has gone through the roof. I love your Anime section to death, but have a few suggestions on how to make it even better (there's the rub).

1. More writers… You brought back everyone from Anime Republic 'cept for your 2 best writers, Dave Smith (probably not possible) and Shola Akinusso. I also think bringing Shidoshi over from Gamefan would help add diversity (but know that wont ever happen).
2. More in-depth interviews… Less like the one with Toshiro Kawamoto and more like the one with the reps from ADV, CPM and Manga. No other Anime mag in the US does relevant interviews, that mean anything, use that to your advantage.
3. More space. I'm greedy...so sue me!! I have a feeling, though, that come June, July and Sept...when the amount of top notch releases goes through the roof, you'll add a few pages.
4. News please! I like the one-page news thing you did in the first issue, how bout something like that in every issue with news and rumors and stuff?? Even half a page would be nice.

That's it...thanks for not killin the Anime section at what I'm sure has been mutiple requests by so-called Die-Hard Gamefans. And thanks for giving us one last "True Enthusiasts Mag."

-Lee Vicios

Anime, like games, is an increasingly cool and edgy art form–a life-giving substance no man or woman should be without. People just don't know what they're missing. Once they find that first one they can identify with, it's all downhill. Sooner or later, we'll recruit everyone. The Wild Arms anime is coming soon, if it's a good one we may pick up a few more gamers…although the cross over seems pretty across the board, at least where our readers are concerned. Okay, to your queries…

1. Dave Smith is the best ever, no doubt about it, but he's spoken for, and we are talking to Shola… I haven't heard from Shidoshi, but I'm not opposed to him pitching in either. More writers will soon join the fray. What am I, chopped liver?

2. Done and done, we have some amazing stuff coming your way.

3. We intend on growing the media section of Play while still adhering to our promise of focussed, thorough game coverage. We love both and intend on covering the best games and anime better than any other publication.

4.It's coming! Anime News begins in August!

IT'S SAFE!

Dear Play,

I have been a fan of your style of magazine since way back at Die Hard Game Fan. I went to E3 this year and lo and behold, here I see you are now behind a new magazine. Now, while I'm a fan of YOUR work, I have never been a fan of your subscription departments. Die Hard Game Fan would arrive every other month and soon enough I became friends with one of the customer service people at the publishing company and we ended up having lunch together a couple of times since my office was near hers. Gamers' Republic? Forget it, LOVED the mag, but I still think I'm owed some issues.

Which brings me to a question I'm sure you're getting a lot of: will this mag be around for the long haul, and if so, can I count on getting it monthly? I just looked at your current issue and knew it was you before I even checked the editorial staff. The mag is great, but that doesn't mean squat if I don't receive it. So will I be getting the mag timely and for a while?

Mario Mendez

Mario,

Cool name, by the way. I'm so glad you asked. Play is a completely different animal from GF or GR. I sold GF after growing it from a back room, scraping for every dime, only to watch a very large corporation swallow it, chew it up, along with us and our readers, and spit it out… So, I sailed a life raft over to GR where, the focus once again, quickly turned to IPOs, mergers, big online, etc. Once again, we were slaves to the investor core, and as a result the vision was blurred and, ultimately, due to circumstances beyond our control (that being the staff who held on until they kicked us in the teeth), it fell. Play is the result of 12 years of learning experience. This is a tightly run, smartly managed publishing company with one goal: to intelligently grow and cultivate Play Magazine. We make the magazine we want, based on what you want, and answer to no one.

I've seen and heard it all, and then some, and as far as I'm concerned, this is the only way to truly maintain creative freedom and financial stability. The first investor that walks in the door and offers to "take us to the next level" is getting a boot in the nuts. We've been there, and it sucks. You're subscription is assured.

BLOODY GOOD

Now that proper identification is required to buy games with a mature rating, how will this affect publishers' decisions to release violence ridden, mature type of games? Would Grand Theft Auto III have sold as many copies as it had if this law were in effect prior to its release? Most everybody remembers that fiasco with Nintendo and Mortal Kombat and the infamous "sweat" during the 16-bit era. Sales of the SNES version of MK (which had the sweat) were poor, and the Genesis version, which had all of the gore intact (red blood and all), sold big. Will developers deliberately take out blood and gore in hopes that their games sell well?

Shane,

On the contrary. I think the enforcement of mature ratings will open the door for developers to make mature games even moreso. GTA III sold as well as it did because first and foremost it's a great game, and given the nature of its subject matter, the violence isn't gratuitous. It's essentially a virtual gangster drama, only the player is the star. People reacted (it's sold six mil and counting) because, for the first time, a developer had given us some credit and ignored convention. It's the only way gaming will continue to grow, and now the companies know it. The witch hunts of the nineties will always rear their ugly heads. Whenever a loser organization that needs propaganda to further their cause can, they'll target entertainment, because they're miserable militant no-life freakazoids, with nothing to do but bitch because their own lives suck so much. Soon, though, this generation of politicians will die off, thank God, and hopefully society will begin to change for the better. In the meantime, have a good laugh at them, and keep on bludgeoning!

gear

NINTENDO WAVEBIRD

$35 www.nintendo.com

My favorite controller just got better. Available now, Nintendo's WaveBird wireless control pad for GameCube works so well, I'll never play without it. It'll run for up to 100 hours on two AA batteries, and being RF instead of line of sight, you don't have to point the thing at the machine. Hell, you don't even have to be in the same room, but playing a game while in another room is a rather foolish endeavor.

ALIENWARE AREA 51-M

$2839 www.alienware.com

While most notebook manufacturers try to get their products smaller and lighter, Alienware defies the norm. The company—known for its gamer-geared desktop-systems—completely disregards conventional thinking to serve up the first notebook specifically designed for gamers. It's not small nor is it light, but the Area 51-M offers speed and power never before seen in a notebook. The unit comes standard with 512MB of PC2100 DDR RAM, a 64MB ATI Rage Mobility 7500 graphics processor, a combination DVD/CD-RW drive, integrated 10/100 Ethernet, and an internal modem. Additional options are available on the company's site. The jewel in the system's crown is its 2.4GHz Pentium 4 processor. This is a standard desktop CPU, as opposed to mobile processors that consume less power and generate less heat but offer slower performance. To harness the capabilities of a desktop CPU in a notebook, the system is full of fans and exhaust units. Think of the Area 51-M as the muscle car of notebook computers—it's heavy and loud, but damn it's fast.

RIO RIOT

$399 www.sonicblue.com

Think of this as the iPod for both PC *and* Mac users—there's no discrimination. Instead, the Rio Riot packs a 20 gig hard drive, allowing absolutely anyone to record over 5,000 songs for their listening pleasure (that's 400 CDs worth of music). A backlit display, easy-to-navigate interface and a comfortable, sleek design make this audio player a powerhouse in your pocket. The convenient Rio DJ Playlist Creator adds to the overall functionality, sorting your tunes by song title, year, decade or favorites—and a handy scroll wheel moves you through your collection quicker than ever (which includes two file formats: MP3 *and* WMA). There's even an FM tuner, allowing you to invade radio airwaves and listen to the latest tracks in pop and rock; and the rechargeable Lithium Ion battery gives users over 10 hours of playback. Perfect for, um, *all* occasions.

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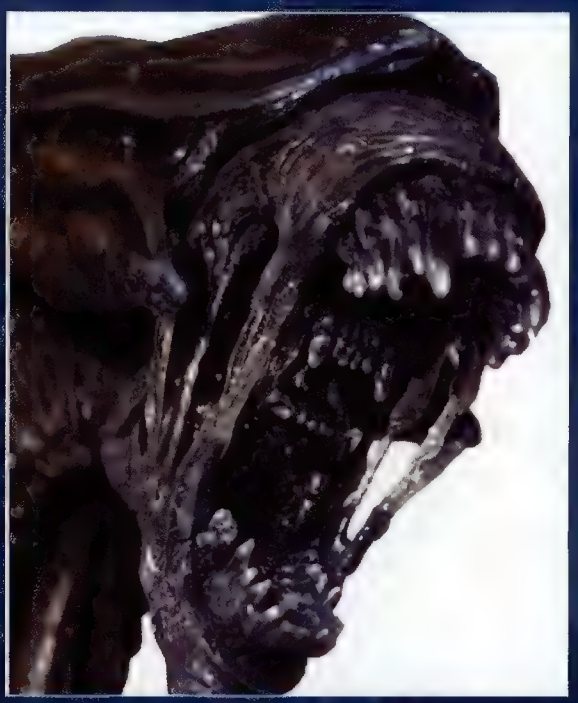
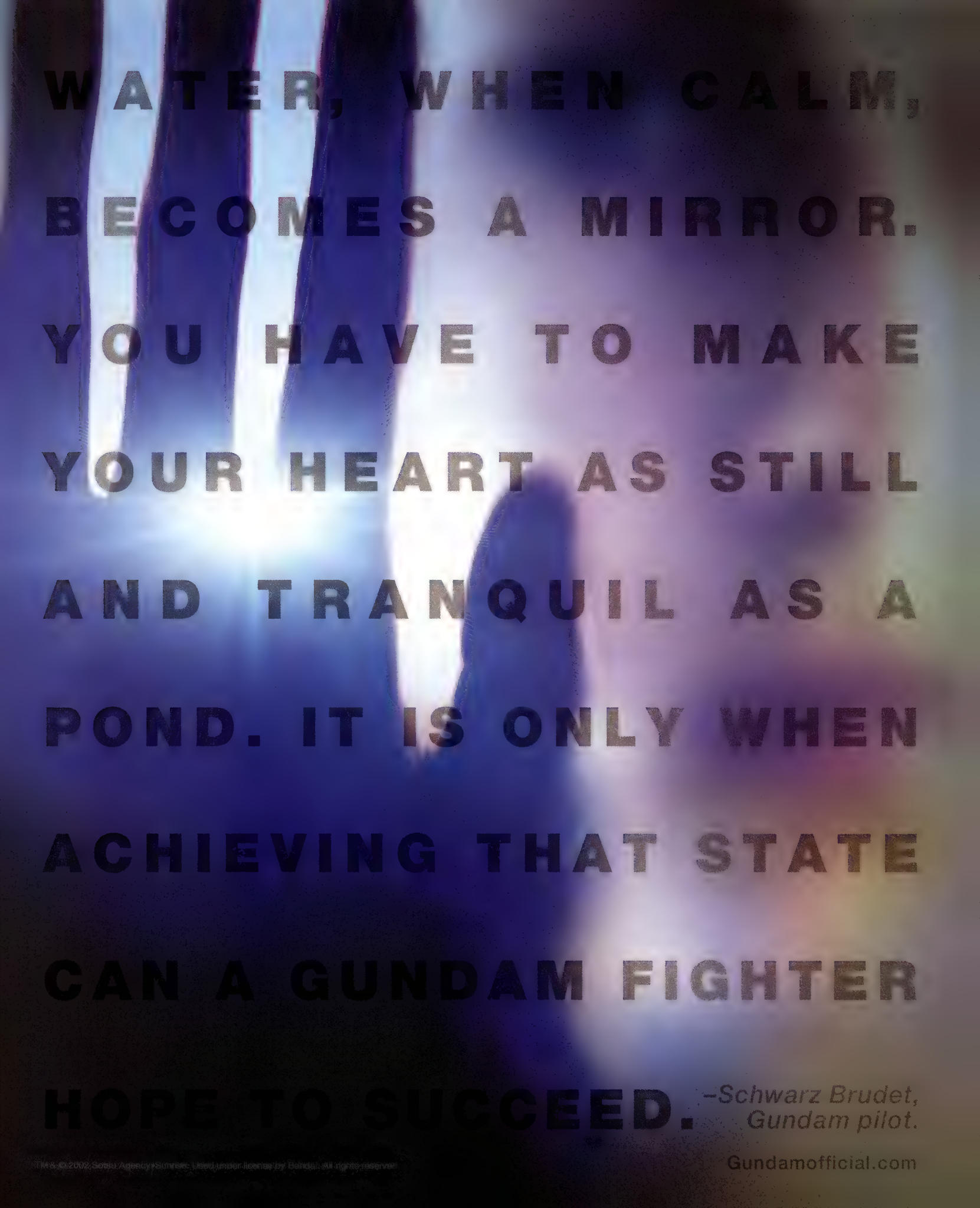


:: palisades toys

Since Palisades' Alien and Predator Mini Busts are already harder to find then an Afhgani chick in a bikini, we thought we'd give you a head start on their Alien Queen before she gets sucked out of the airlock. On the softer, gentler side of things, the company has also recently launched series one of their Muppet Show line—fully articulated action figures based on Jim Henson's Muppets—now celebrating their 25th anniversary of freaking children out the world over. The Series 2 Electric Mayhem Stage Playset featuring Animal will be available soon. For more info. check 'em out on the web at palisadestoys.com.

electric mayhem animal



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ATARI

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